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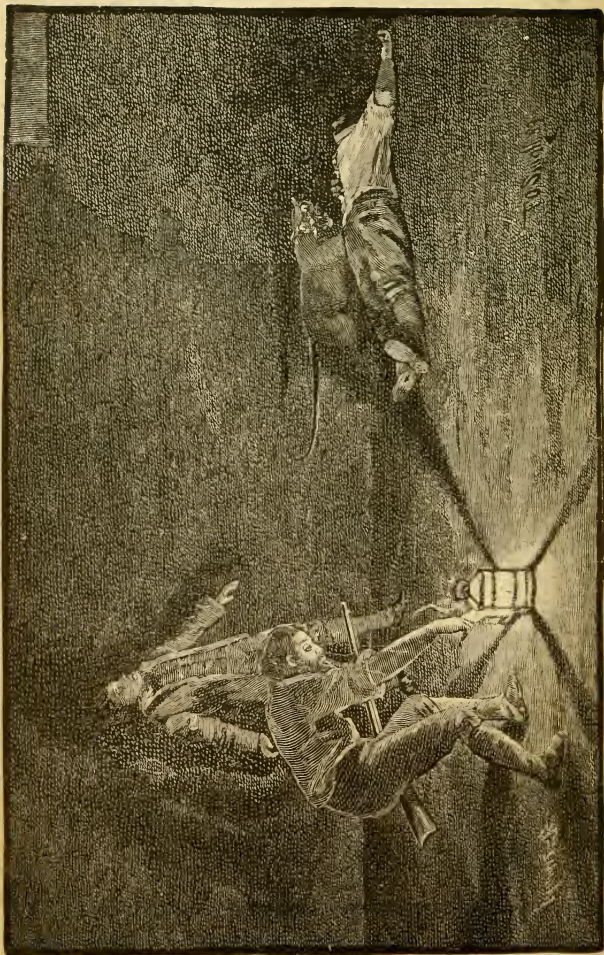


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"HE NEVER LET GO HIS HOLD ON TOM."

THE LOSS OF THE SWANSEA

A STORY OF THE FLORIDA COAST



BY

W. L. ALDEN

AUTHOR OF "THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMY BROWN,"
"THE MORAL PIRATES," ETC.

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THE LOSS OF THE SWANSEA.

CHAPTER I.

THE MUTINY.

I WAS nearly fifteen and my brother Tom was a little over sixteen when father died. There were no more of us, for our mother had died when I was so little that I could scarcely remember her. The only relation we had in the world was an uncle whom we had never seen and who lived in America, in the colony of the Carolinas.

Father was a British channel pilot, and Tom and I were born and had lived except for one week, all our lives, in Bristol. This I have been told is the finest city in England, though, of course, everybody knows that it is not quite so big as London. Father owned

a share in a pilot boat, and he often took us out with him when he was cruising for a homeward-bound ship. We used to help the men work the boat, and we were better sailors than either of the two apprentices.

Once a man hired father to sail a new brig from Bristol round to Penzance, and we went with him. That was the one week when we did not live in Bristol, which I just mentioned. We enjoyed it very much and learned a good deal about square-rigged vessels while we were in the brig.

Pilots did not make much profit in those days, and father left us nothing except half a crown and his share of the pilot boat. Before he died he told his partners to sell his share and use the money to send Tom and me to our uncle in America. The two partners bought the share themselves for thirty pounds, which was all it was worth, for they were good honest men, and when they had paid our passage to America on the brig Swansea, they gave us two pounds ten and

threepence, which was all the money that was left.

The captain of the Swansea agreed to take us as if we were gentlemen passengers. We were to live with him in the great cabin and were not to do any work. Not that we were not quite willing to work our passage, but Captain Robinson, father's oldest partner, said, "No; it was our late pardner's orders that you was to be sent to America, and that did not mean that you should work your way; and it shall be done accordin' to orders, for a dead man's wishes ought for to be carried out, providin' it can be done; you don't want to have ghosts a-visitin' you."

The Swansea was a fine brig of four hundred tons. She carried four guns on a side besides a big gun amidships. These guns were to keep off pirates, though, as it turned out, they were the very reason why we fell into the hands of pirates; for if we had not been so well armed I doubt not that we should have sailed straight to

Charleston and the poor captain would have been alive at this day.

We had two mates and a crew of twelve men besides the cook and the cabin boy, so, for the size of the brig, we were strong-handed.

The captain, whose name was Fearing, was a Bristol man, who had known father for many years. He was a good, kind man, but he was not severe enough to keep a bad crew in order, and, what was worse, he often drank too much spirits, and then acted so foolishly that the men had no respect for him. I do not like to say this, because Captain Fearing was always kind to Tom and me. He was a brave man, too, and always ready to do his duty when he was sober, but it is the truth, and there is no help for it.

The mate was a smart, active seaman, but I did not like him, for I always felt that he could not be trusted. Instead of keeping spirits from the captain, he would often bring a bottle with him on deck and offer it to the

poor man who could not resist the temptation to drink when the stuff was, as you might say, held up to his lips. But I had no reason to complain of the mate's treatment of Tom and me. He was always pleasant and respectful, treating us indeed like young gentlemen, and he would sometimes tell us wonderful stories of the exploits of great pirates, such as Captain John Morgan, and other like bloody men.

The second mate, Mr. Otway, was a hard, brutal man, who was fond of knocking the men about and of using dreadful language; but one night, after we had been at sea about three weeks, he fell overboard. At least he was missing, and it was supposed he had fallen overboard, though I now believe that he was murdered by the crew.

And surely a worse crew never sailed out of Bristol. They were shipped because sailors were scarce at the time, and Captain Fearing had to take such men as he could get. They were mostly Englishmen, but a

drunken, vagabond set, and there were three or four foreigners among them, Spaniards and such — wicked-looking men who were fit for any desperate work. The men obeyed Mr. Otway because they were afraid of him, and they generally treated the mate respectfully, but they would insult the captain to his face.

We had pleasant weather all the voyage, for it was the month of June, when the winter was over and the summer hurricanes had not begun. The brig was a very fast sailer, and was not heavily loaded, but I heard that her cargo was a very valuable one, although I never knew what it was.

There is a strong current called the Gulf Stream that sets up the American coast, and when we were approaching it the captain kept to the southward in order to make allowance for it; for he was not an expert navigator with instruments, and used to say that he valued dead reckoning and the hand-lead more than all the brass instruments and

mathematics that were ever invented. As it afterwards turned out, he was mistaken in his reckoning, and we were much further south than we ought to have been, though I think the mate knew it all the time.

Early one morning Tom and I were awakened by a noise in the cabin, and turning out in a hurry, we found the cabin filled with men. The captain was sitting in a chair with his hands and feet tied, and the mate was standing in front of him making a speech. Nearly all the crew were there, some of them grinning and passing low jokes, but more of them looking fierce and excited. The captain was quite sober and had evidently been seized and bound while he was asleep, for he was in his night-clothes. Nobody paid any attention to Tom and me, and we tried not to attract any notice.

“I’m very sorry that this has happened, Captain Fearing,” said the mate, “for I’ve nothing in the world against you, but you must see that it’s a shame that a smart brig

like the Swansea, and a stout crew should be wasted in trading when we could make our fortunes out of hand in a few months as gentlemen rovers."

"You're a scoundrel, John March," replied the captain, "a mutinous, piratical hound."

"Now, don't use such language, Captain, for I want to be friendly with you, though, in course, I knew that you're ruffled a bit at being lashed up in your own cabin. But it's this way, you see. The men are determined to make a cruise or two in the brig, and as I'm the only navigator on board, except you, they naturally want me to take charge of her, knowing that you've a prejudice against a roving life. I'd have continued the voyage to Charleston if I'd had my way, but when it's a choice between commanding as brave a set of men as ever I sot eyes on, or having my head split open, why, in course, I chooses the first."

Here some of the men began to murmur that there had been enough talk,

and that they couldn't wait all day for soft speeches.

"What do you mean to do with me?" asked the Captain. "And what do you mean to do with the two young gentlemen?"

"We are going to treat you very handsome, Captain," replied the mate. "The brig is at this identical moment hove to in sight of the coast of Florida. There's a boat all ready for you, and you and the two young gentlemen can take it and pull ashore, or steer for Charleston, just as you please. We'll give you provisions and arms, and you'll find fresh water ashore; and I think you'll admit that this is more than you've any right to expect."

"Let the kids join in with us, if so be that they want to make their fortins," said one of the men.

"They don't want to join; they wouldn't be of no use except to share our earnings, and besides it was in our bargain that they were to be put ashore with the captain. I

sticks to my bargain, my lads, and I expect you to stick to yours," said the mate.

I was very glad to hear this said, for I was beginning to have a terrible fear that I should be made to stay with the pirates.

"And now, Captain," continued the mate, "if you'll pass your word to go ashore quiet and peaceable, I'll cast off these lashin's, and you shall dress yourself and leave us, for there's a nice breeze springing up."

The captain wanted to burst out in violent language; but he saw it was no use, so he presently said, "I'm in your power and I must submit."

"That's right," exclaimed the mate; "I do like to see a man act smooth and appreciate a kindness when it's shown to him. Now, men, you can go on deck and I'll stay here till the captain and the young gentlemen are ready."

Tom and I dressed in a hurry, and as soon as the captain was ready we all went on deck, and the mate invited us to get into one of

the quarter boats. The men stood near by, silent and scowling.

"You'll find everything comfortable in the boat," said the mate, as pleasantly as if we had hired it of him for a pleasure trip. "There's two hams, and some biscuit, and there's two guns and ammunition, and there's blankets, and a lantern. Why, you might go a pirating yourself, Captain, with that craft. I really envy you, I do."

All the while he was talking the mate was pushing us into the boat, and passing one of the falls to the captain and one to me. "Now lower away smartly," he added, "for we want to make sail on the brig.

"This is all foolishness," cried one of the sailors, with a lot of wicked words which I won't mention. "Cut one of the falls, and drown the lot of them, I say."

March jumped on the rail, holding on by one of the davits, and drew a pistol. "I've passed my word that they shall go ashore safe," he said, "and you know me and know

I'm a man of my word. The first man that touches one of those falls is a dead man."

The men said no more, and we lost no time in getting clear of the brig. As we pulled away the mate waved his hat to the captain, and then jumped down from the rail and we saw him no more.

We pulled straight for the shore, Tom and I taking the oars and the captain steering. The shore was only about ten miles away, and the sea was quite smooth, with a nice light breeze that helped to keep us cool. The captain said nothing for a long while, but kept looking back at the brig. The pirates had filled the main top-sail as soon as we had left, and were now standing to the south'ard, and we never expected to see them or the brig again.

"It's the bottle that has done this," exclaimed the captain after a while. "If I'd have kept sober I could have seen this mutiny brewing, and stopped it, but now I

am a ruined man. All I had in the world was in that vessel."

As he seemed to be talking to himself and not to us, neither Tom nor I said anything to him.

"And John March, too, a man whose life I had saved. To think that he should turn against me and seize my brig. But he never had any conscience, and he is sure to come to the gallows."

"But if it hadn't been for him, sir," I ventured to say, "we should all have been drowned."

"I suppose so," answered the captain; "but it would have been better for me if I had been. Take warning by me, boys, and never touch spirits. I've taken my last drink, but I've mended my ways when it is too late to undo the ruin that I have brought on myself. Before you ever take a glass of spirits, you jump overboard and drown yourself, for you'd much better be dead than a drunkard."

I was very glad to hear that the captain

had resolved never to drink again, for I liked him very much, all but his one bad habit.

But before very long he began to overhaul the things in the stern sheets, as if he were searching for something, and could not find it. Then he said, "Boys, just look about you and see if there is a bottle in the boat." We couldn't find any, and then the captain broke out against the mate, saying that he had purposely set him ashore without a drop of spirits, though he knew he couldn't live without it. So I saw that the captain's reformation would only last till he could get at the bottle again. It was very lucky for us that the mate had not put any strong liquors in the boat; for if he had done so the captain would certainly have made himself unfit to manage the boat and would very likely have capsized it and drowned us all.

I had noticed a little piece of white paper lying on the bottom of the boat, and when the breeze fluttered it I saw it had writing

on it. So I pointed it out to the captain, and he read it out loud, for he was a poor scholar and could not read unless he pronounced every word, and spelled all the long ones. I picked the note up afterwards and have kept it to this day. Here it is:

HONORED CAPTAIN:

I take the great liberty of saying that we are now in latitude 29° , your calculations not having been quite right, through no fault of yours. You will find a small river, if you pull straight ashore, but the entrance to it won't be easy to find unless you bring two tall pine trees in a line. If I may humbly advise I would say don't stop on this coast, for you might meet some bad characters, but steer northerly for about eighty miles, where you will find a settlement. With my duty to the young gentlemen, and wishing you health and a prosperous voyage I am your humble servant,

JOHN MARCH.

CHAPTER II.

ASHORE.

WHEN the captain had read the mate's letter he was more angry than ever, and said that Mr. March was the most cruel and cowardly hypocrite that ever lived. I did not know what to think, for though the mate had turned pirate, and stolen the captain's ship, he had saved the captain from being murdered by the crew and had saved Tom and me from what would have been worse than being murdered. It was certain that he was a very bad man, but for all that he did seem to be kind-hearted, and it was good in him to write that letter, for without it we could never have found the river.

When we came near the shore we could see nothing but a long stretch of sand beach

with low sand hills, and a thick forest of pine-trees behind them. There were two pines that were about half a mile apart, so far as we could judge, and stood out separate from the rest of the trees, for, as we afterwards found, the forest had been cleared away around them. We brought these two trees in line with one another and then steered for the beach, where we found an inlet with the tide running into it. This brought us into a little lagoon that lay between the beach and the mainland. Continuing to keep the trees in line we crossed the lagoon and found ourselves at the mouth of a small river, up which we pulled, delighted to find ourselves in the shade of the forest.

It was a beautiful river. It was so narrow that the trees on each bank nearly touched their branches overhead, and half a mile from the lagoon the water became perfectly clear, so that we could often see the sandy bottom, though in most places the river was

very deep. All sorts of strange and beautiful birds were among the trees, and we saw more snakes in the water and on the shore than we wanted to see. Once we startled a large wild beast that was sleeping on the shore and that was spotted like a leopard, but as soon as it saw us it bounded into the forest. Tom and I were perfectly happy. The beautiful river was so much better than the cabin of the Swansea, that we began to be glad that the crew had mutinied and driven us away.

A mile up the river we came to a small clearing where there was a sort of fort, very near the river, and a nice landing-place for boats. The fort was quite deserted, and at once we went ashore to explore it.

It was built of great pine logs, squared and fitted closely together. It had only two windows, high above the ground, one at each end, and was loop-holed, like a real stone fort on every side. There was an immensely thick door in the side toward the

river, which could be fastened from the inside with an iron bar, but it stood wide open and the doorway was filled with the biggest spider-webs I ever saw. There was another smaller door in the opposite side of the house, which also had its iron bar, and was closed.

There was nothing in the house but loose straw, which was scattered all over the floor; a long table, some rough benches, and a few pots, pans and plates. Grass had grown up between the boards of the floor in many places, and it was plain that nobody had been inside the fort for a long while. There was a curious smell about the place that reminded me of a menagerie I had once seen in Bristol, and I could not understand why Captain Fearing would not at first let us search the fort, but told us to go and bring up the things that were in the boat.

While we were busy the captain found a long pole with which he carefully stirred up the straw, and finally threw it all out of the

back door. Then he made us help him stop up the holes in the floor with clay, and finally we scrubbed the place out with thick branches of trees, and then made beds out of pine twigs that we cut and brought into the fort.

We had a dinner of cold ham and biscuit, and then the captain when he had lit his pipe told us that the fort must have been built by pirates as a place to stay in while repairing their vessels. Near the brink of the river there was a great tar-kettle that was empty, but which had been used for heating pitch with which to calk seams. "You see," said the captain, "that villain the mate knows this place, and has been a pirate at some time in his life. Perhaps his gang was the only one which used the fort, for in my opinion, nobody has been here for a good many years."

In the afternoon Tom and I went out to explore, after the captain had warned us to keep a sharp lookout for snakes, especially

a terrible variety with watchmen's rattles at their tails, which can kill a man in an hour or two, they are so venomous.

We went out of the back door and up a sloping path which led through bushes so tall and thick that you might have stood close to the side of it without suspecting that there was a path there. The path itself was pretty well grown up with weeds and bushes, but still we could make it out and we followed it till we came to a hill, in the side of which was the entrance to a cave.

Mr. March had kindly given us a lantern, and Tom ran back to get it. We lit it with a flint and steel that I always carried in my pocket, and then we entered the cave. It was so large that we could stand up straight in it, and the bottom, which was fine gravel, sloped downward pretty steeply. There was not much to see in the cave until we had gone, I should think, twenty rods into it, when we came to a wonderful little lake which occupied the whole floor of the cave

and prevented us from going any further. The roof of the cave glittered beautifully, for it was all full of white crystals, some of which hung down in long points and sparkled like frost on a window when the sun strikes it.

There was a small skiff lying partly in the water and partly on the shore, with a short paddle lying in the bottom of it. There was a little water in the skiff, but when we launched it the water did not increase, which showed that the skiff did not leak. We hauled it up on the shore again to keep it from drifting away, and resolved to come back and make a voyage on the lake the next day.

On the way back to the house we found an orange-tree full of delicious fruit, and some bushes covered with large, beautiful berries such as we had never seen before. We did not venture to eat the berries, for oftentimes it happens that strange fruit is deadly; but we carried some of them to the

captain, who said that they were wholesome and particularly refreshing on a hot day.

When night came the captain loaded the two guns and placed his powder-horn and bullets where he could easily reach them. Then he barred the big door, and we all lay down and Tom and the captain soon fell asleep.

I was not sleepy, and was lying and watching the pattern that the bright moonlight made on the floor, as it streamed through the loop-holes, when I heard a curious rattling noise under the floor, and thought at once of the terrible snakes of which the captain had spoken. The noise kept growing louder and more frequent, as if there were a great number of reptiles under the floor. I was about to waken my companions when I saw a serpent gliding over the floor just where the moonlight that came through one of the windows made a great square patch of light.

The snake was close to Tom and was

moving towards him, but as soon as it passed out of the moonlight it became invisible. It was making a slow rattling noise as it writhed along, but this stopped the moment I struck my flint and steel. I kindled the lantern as soon as possible, and saw the snake close to Tom and just beginning to crawl across his body. My brother was always a sound sleeper and he did not wake until the snake had passed over him and crawled a dozen feet away. Then I shouted, and both Tom and the captain started up, and I thought at first the captain would have shot me before I could explain what was the matter.

When we came to look about us carefully we found five of the serpents in the room, four of which we killed, but the fifth escaped down an opening in the floor which we had overlooked when we were stopping up the holes, and through which our horrible visitors had without doubt entered. When we had made this hole safe by turning a large

iron pot upside down over it, and had thrown the carcasses of the dead reptiles out of the door, we lay down to sleep again. Under the floor, the snakes kept up their rattling, and the captain said there were probably hundreds of them there, but as we were now sure that they could not get at us, we did not mind them.

But about midnight we had another visit. We heard the branches and twigs crackling in the woods outside, and thought at first that the pirates must be approaching, but presently near the door some animal began to snarl and growl, like a lion — or as I suppose a lion growls, for I am thankful to say I never heard one. We were all awake and listening, and after a while made out that there were at least two of the beasts, for they began to quarrel and swear at one another, and every one knows that it takes two to quarrel.

The captain was at first all for getting up and shooting the beasts through a loop-hole,

but he remembered that our supply of ammunition was small and that we might need it to defend ourselves against worse foes than wild beasts. "Let 'em growl, boys," said he. "They're like sailors; the more they growl the less mischief there is in them; that is, if so be that they are growling on the other side of a stout wall."

The beasts were really what the colonists of the country farther north called panthers. They growled and fought, and made a hideous noise, so that the snakes, not liking it, rattled all the louder, but we knew that no beast could break the door open, and so we felt perfectly safe.

Suddenly a great dark object came flying through one of the windows and landed on the floor with a heavy thud. Of course we were on our feet in an instant, for we knew by the growling of the beast and the flashing of its eyes that it was a panther. As soon as it saw us it retreated to a corner, where it crouched, watching us and making

up its mind on which one of us it would spring. But it did not have much time for thinking, for the captain fired at it and killed it instantly with a brace of bullets between its eyes.

All this was exciting, and Tom and I being too young to be sensible naturally enjoyed it. Still I was tired and would gladly have slept, and could have wished that the snakes and beasts were less fond of visiting strangers. There was no way of closing the window, and it was quite possible that another panther or some new kind of animal would use it to pay us another visit, so we resolved that one of us should stay awake and keep watch while the others slept.

Tom agreed to be the first to keep watch, so the captain and I were soon asleep. But I am sorry to say that Tom, forgetting his duty, followed our example, though doubtless it was his purpose to remain watchful, and he fell asleep by accident. But we were not to sleep much more that night, for be-

fore very long a scream from Tom awoke us all, and we found that another panther had come in at the window.

This time the beast had fallen directly upon my brother and had sunk its claws deeply into his arm, but being alarmed at the noise that followed it, lay still, growling and threatening, but not biting. Once again I lit the lantern, the captain all the while telling Tom to lie perfectly still and feign to be dead, which was his only chance of escape.

The captain and I stood each with a gun in hand at a short distance from the panther, who watched us as closely as we watched him. We did not dare to shoot lest we should hit Tom as well as the enemy, and we could only wait and see if the beast would not move away from Tom, and give us the occasion to fire. But the panther was not in the least hurry. He was not at all afraid of us, and was apparently wondering whether he had better make a meal of

Tom, without killing the captain and me, or whether it would not be better policy to kill us first and enjoy his dinner afterwards.

The only thing that disturbed him was the lantern, which stood on the floor near the captain. Doubtless the beast thought it was the eye of some monstrous animal, though he must have wondered what had become of the animal's body. He turned his head toward it every few minutes and growled fiercely, but he never let go his hold of Tom, and gave us no chance to fire at him.

At last the captain could contain himself no longer, and he thought of a way of frightening the beast. He took a paper from his pocket, and crumpling it together, lit it at the lantern. When it had become a flaming ball of fire he boldly approached the panther and threw it in the monster's face. The panther let go his hold of Tom and sprang back, but almost instantly he leaped with amazing swiftness upon the captain, bring-

ing him violently to the floor. I was now desperate, for if Tom and the captain were killed it would be only misery for me to live in that wild place. The captain was lying on his back with the panther on his chest, and it was as dangerous to fire at the beast from a distance as it had been when poor Tom was in his clutches. But I ran close up to the panther, and putting my gun against its shoulder pulled the trigger, trusting that the bullets would not pass through its body and pierce the poor captain.

As it turned out I had done the best thing that could have been done, for the beast was instantly killed, and the captain, pushing the carcass from him, rose up unhurt except for a few scratches, none of which were serious. Tom was in a dead swoon. This, however, was not so much from fright, for he was a brave fellow, as from the pain of his wound. The creature's claws had somewhat torn the flesh of his left arm, and it had sunk its claws deeply into his left breast.

However, by chafing his sound arm and hand we soon brought Tom back to his senses, and the captain bound up his wounds and made him lie down where no creature springing through the window could reach him. I was surprised to see the captain carefully pick up the burnt fragments of the paper he had thrown at the panther, and then drop them with a sigh. I asked him what the paper might be.

“It was my commission, lad,” he replied. “My commission as master of the Swansea. But of what use could it be to me now? All the papers in the world could not make me less a poor drunken wretch who has let his ship be taken from him.”

CHAPTER III.

IN THE CAVE.

THERE had been so little sleep among us all that night that as soon as the dawn came and brought with it assurance that the wild creatures would leave us in peace, we disposed ourselves to rest, and I found one of the dead panthers as good a pillow as I had ever known.

We woke toward noon much refreshed. The captain washed and dressed Tom's wounds and told us that by the next day at the furthest we must leave the fort and voyage along the coast in search of a settlement.

"Why not stay here until my brother is quite recovered?" I asked. "If we bar the windows so that nothing can enter, we shall

be very comfortable. Besides, there is the cave which we ought to explore."

"No good can come of our staying here, and much harm may come of it," he replied.

"May I ask what harm, sir?" I asked.

"I mistrust John March and I mistrust the crew. They would gladly have murdered us, and they may yet turn back and make sure that we do not escape to tell tales of them. It is my duty to see you young gentlemen safely to Charleston, and when once that is done I care little what happens to me."

"Suppose the pirates should come," said Tom. "Could we not hold the fort against them?"

"We have but a dozen charges of ammunition for each gun and the villains know it. They would surely capture us at last, and would put us to the torture in return for having resisted them. If they find us here we are lost, and I am therefore anxious to make good our escape as soon as possible."

"Then let us start at once," cried Tom. "If I cannot row at least I can steer, and in a few days the stiffness will have gone from my arm."

"Let us start then to-night, so that if by chance the wretches should have returned and should be lying off the coast they could not see us," answered the captain. "We will carry a cargo of oranges with us, for they are both food and drink, and it will take us at least a week before we can gain the nearest settlement."

Tom and I thought that the matter being thus decided we should explore the cave without any more delay; so we took the lantern and set about it. But first we resolved to ascend the hill in which was the entrance to the cave. We had climbed but a short distance when we were able to see the sea, and there, to our great dismay, we saw a vessel lying but a short distance from the land.

We made out at once that she was not

the Swansea, for she was a schooner, and we began to hope that she might be an honest vessel, that had run short of water; that her captain meant to supply himself from our river, and that he would take us off with him.

We were going to carry the good news to Captain Fearing when I remembered that beyond doubt the fort had been built by pirates and that no honest vessel knew anything about the river. So all the more we hurried to warn the captain. Providence willed, however, that we should be too late, for we had scarcely entered the back door of the fort when a large boat carrying fifteen men whom we knew at a glance to be pirates, swept up the river and came to the landing-place, where all the men hastily tumbled out.

Captain Fearing had seen the boat, and had boldly gone down to meet it, before we could speak to him. He was unarmed, and I could see that the pirates were greatly

surprised to find him there, and that they were not of the crew of the Swansea. They gathered around him while he spoke to them, and then some of them went to see our boat, that was lying partly behind an overhanging tree, so that they had not at first seen it. I greatly admired the bravery of the captain, who trusted himself among those bloody men; I was hoping I know not what, for I well knew that between an honest man and pirates there could be no peace, when I saw one of the wretches put a pistol to the captain's head and blow out the poor man's brains.

There could not be the least doubt that the captain was dead, and terribly as we were shocked we knew that if we were not to share his fate we must escape before the pirates caught sight of us. The very fact that they did not come to the fort to search for us the instant they had shot the captain was proof that he had not told them of us.

"The cave is our only chance, Tom," I

whispered. "Catch up the ammunition and the guns and I will take all the provisions I can carry, and we will hide in the cave. It is lucky we have the lantern all ready."

While I was speaking I gathered up as many biscuit as I could stuff in the breast of my shirt, and seized what was left of the two hams—which was a whole one and a fragment of another—and ran towards the cave, meaning to leave the provisions, and if possible return for more. But I had hardly started back when I met Tom running at full speed, and I learned from him that the pirates were approaching the fort, and that he had just time to escape unseen.

As there was really no chance of our remaining concealed in the cave if the pirates should search it, Tom suggested that we should put all our things in the boat and paddle out into the lake. Although I had been eager to make such a strange underground voyage only an hour before, the death of the captain had somehow changed

my thoughts, and I did not hanker after the darkness of the cave. So I said to Tom that unless the pirates knew of the cave they would not be likely to come to it, and that at any rate they would not search for us, because they did not know of our existence.

"Well," said Tom, not very well pleased, "I suppose we can stop half an hour or so here at the mouth of the cave, for it will take them that time to break into the fort."

"What do you mean?" cried I.

"Why, I shut the big door and barred it before I left," answered Tom. "That will delay them and give us time."

"And tell them, too, that the captain had some one with him, for they well know that he could not have left the fort and barred the door from the inside himself. How could you be so stupid? Now after they have broken in they will find the back door open and know the way we have taken. They will be here in a few moments."

"We have plenty of time," said Tom, without trying to defend himself. Indeed he never did, for the dear, honest, brave lad knew that he was a little slow and dull, and thought it quite natural that what he had done should be wrong. "The pirates," he continued, "will make sure that there is somebody in the fort ready to defend it, and the very silence will make them cautious. As I said, it will be a good half-hour before they get here, and if we have the skiff all ready we can take to it before they can see us. Besides, they may have no light with them."

"The boat is sure to have a lantern," I replied. "However, Tom, you did what you thought was best, and perhaps it was. Come, let's get the skiff ready."

We baled all the water out of the skiff and stowed our provisions and ammunition in it; and then, gun in hand, we went back to sit at the mouth of the cave and see the sunlight as long as possible. We knew the

way between the mouth of the cave and the place where the skiff lay so well that we could find it without a light, so we left the lantern in the skiff.

We talked in whispers as we sat waiting for the pirates, and I think neither of us had very much hope that when once we should be driven into the cave we should ever see the dear light of day again.

At last we heard a shout from the fort and knew that the pirates had broken in. We instantly started for the skiff, but the pirates must have known all about the cave, for they were close after us with a lantern that gave light enough to light up the whole cave, and we had barely time to leap into the skiff, blow out our own lantern and shove off when they were upon us, yelling and calling on us with awful oaths to come back.

I sat in the stern of the skiff and paddled hard, but to our great fright we found that what we had supposed to be a lake was

really a small pool of water. An underground stream entered the cave a few yards from the place where we found the boat, and after making a little pool perhaps fifty feet wide and seventy-five long, the stream left it through an archway some four feet high. This archway was situated at the further end of the cave.

It was impossible to find any place where we would be out of sight of the pirates. As I paddled around the pool hoping to find a projecting rock that would give us a shelter the pirates could see us plainly. They ordered us to come back, and as we paid no attention to them they began firing at us. By great good fortune none of them had guns, but as there were nine of them in the cave and nearly all of them discharging their pistols at us, it was not at all pleasant. Several times the balls hit the boat, and once one came so near my ear that I thought it had struck me.

"This won't do," exclaimed Tom. "Shove

her under that arch as quick as you can, Jack."

You may ask why I had not already done this, as I have said that the arch was high enough to admit the skiff. The reason was that the water flowed under it with a current so strong that I feared that once in it the skiff would be swept along in spite of the paddle. But our affairs were now desperate, and certain death awaited us unless we could find a shelter.

We were only two boats' lengths from the arch when Tom spoke. I had made up my mind that the arch was our only chance, and since Tom was willing to risk it, I turned the skiff into the current and we glided under the arch out of sight and range of our enemies.

The moment we found ourselves in the current I was more frightened by far than when the pirates were firing at us. The force of the water was terrible, and we were whirled along in deep darkness without the

possibility of stopping our progress. The passage in which we were was apparently made with as much regularity as if it was the work of man. I could touch either side with my paddle, but the sides seemed perfectly smooth and slippery, and there was nothing to which I could cling. As for the roof of the passage, it was for the most part so high that I could not reach it, though once the paddle, which I was holding over my head, struck violently against the rock.

We had traveled in this way for several minutes, although it seemed very much longer, and neither of us had spoken, when I accidentally caught hold of an iron ring on the left side of the passage or gallery, and although I was nearly dragged out of the boat I managed to hold on and bring the boat to a standstill. We had no rope with us, or I would have made the boat fast, but as it was I could hold her for a long time without getting exhausted. I called to Tom to light the lantern. When he had

done this and we could see each other the place seemed less dreadful.

The ring had of course been fastened in the rock by some one, though for what reason I could not imagine. But its finding gave me new courage, for it showed that we were not the first ones who had explored the cave.

"What are we to do now?" I said to Tom.

"Go on, when you get tired of holding the skiff," he replied.

"Can you see what I am holding on by?"

"No," he answered. "A bit of rock, I suppose."

"Nothing of the kind," I exclaimed. "It is an iron ring."

"And what if it is?" asked Tom.

"Why, just this; somebody has been here before us, and put this ring in its place. What do you suppose that was done for?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Tom, without showing much interest in the ring.

"I think," I continued, "that this is only

one of a number of rings, and that a rope used to run through them the whole length of this channel, so that when a boat wanted to return against the current, the man in the boat could lay hold of the rope and pull himself back."

"That may be so," said Tom, "but the rope isn't there now, so it's of no use to us. You can't hold on to that ring forever, and if you could we should starve to death, after a while. You'll have to let go presently, and then down we float again."

"But, Tom, can't you see that if people used to go up and down this passage it must lead somewhere, and we are not going to be carried down any dangerous cataract or anything of that sort?"

"I suppose it does lead somewhere; but since we can never get back again, I don't think it makes much difference whether it leads over a cataract or into some dark hole where we will have to stay and starve. But let her go, Jack. We might as well know

what is going to happen, for it is no good stopping here."

I did not much like the idea of committing ourselves to the current again. There seemed no help for it, however; so after saying my prayers I let go the ring and the skiff shot away once more.

The lantern, which was now lighted, showed us that every few yards there was a ring in the wall, and to one of these rings was hanging a bit of rope. I caught hold of it, but it was very rotten. However, I knew now that I was right about the rings. I felt sure that it was perfectly safe to go down the channel, though I saw that it would be impossible to return.

I know very well that a person badly frightened and floating with a strong current in the dark can know but little of the distance over which he passes. But I was quite sure that we were moving fully eight miles an hour, and we were certainly in that curious underground river for at least

ten minutes. I also feel safe in saying that we must have gone a good mile when I saw a glimmer of light ahead. Then we came suddenly into another large pool where the water was quiet and which was dimly lighted by an opening in the roof of the cave that seemed fifty feet above us and through which we could catch a glimpse of a little scrap of blue sky.

CHAPTER IV.

MAROONED.

No sooner had we entered this second pool than we were startled by a loud hail. Greatly surprised we peered through the indistinct light and saw dimly the figure of a man. He was standing on a little beach at one side of the pool and was waving his arms at us.

We were so glad to see any one in that dismal place that we at once paddled ashore without caring whether the man was a pirate or not, though even if he had been we were well armed and had nothing to fear from one man.

When we reached him he fell on his knees and begged us to have pity on a poor wretch and take him away with us.

Then he asked who we were ; if we belonged to Blackbeard's crew, and if we were rovers, and a dozen other questions all at once.

He was the most ragged man I had ever seen. His clothes were so tattered that he no longer wore them as clothes were worn, but merely twisted them around his body, leaving himself half-naked. His hair and beard were very long and nearly white. His eyes had a strange wild look about them, due no doubt to the long time that he had spent in the dark cave.

As soon as he found that we were not dangerous, he begged for rum and tobacco. Finding that we had none, he was very thankful for a piece of boiled ham, which he ate ravenously.

"How long have you been here?" I asked, after he had finished the ham.

"About three or four years," he replied. "Leastways I think so, but a man can't keep his reckoning when he's buried alive. I remember it was the year 1718 that I shipped

with Blackbeard, and I was with him two years when he marooned me here."

"Then you've only been here about a year; it is 1721 now."

"One year or four years, what's the odds when you're alone and starving underground?" he answered. "Seems to me I've been here a hundred years."

"And there isn't any way out of the cave except by water?" I asked.

"Not unless you was a bird or a bat and could fly out of that there scuttle up there. You can see about all there is of the cave. Here I've lived and slept and starved and had nothing to do but to walk up and down and catch fish. I've had fishin' enough to last me the rest of my life."

"Haven't you had anything to eat but fish?"

"Not a blessed thing, young master," he replied. "And raw fish at that."

"How did you catch them?" I asked.

"I'll show you," he said, getting up and

wading into the water till it was up to his waist. He stood perfectly still for a while, looking down into the water, for his eyes were so well used to the dim light that he could see as well as we could in bright daylight. Presently he darted his hands into the water with wonderful swiftness and brought up a good-sized fish which he showed to us and then flung back into the pool.

"It's easy enough after you get used to it," he said, coming ashore again; "but it was a good while, and I was precious hungry before I thought of it. You see the fish here is naturally blind — for what would be the use of wastin' eyes on 'em? — and so they can't see me. But never mind about fish, young master; let's get out of here and get some decent grub."

"Before we agree to take you with us," said I, "we must know all about you. So go on and tell us who you are and how you came here."

“I’ll tell you everything, faithful and true, for I know you’re too kind to desert a poor wretch here. I can see it in the handsome faces of the pair of you.

“I’ve been a pirate, young masters both, for why should I deny it? I’m an Englishman, like you, and I went a privateerin’ when I was a boy. It was just about the same thing as piratin’, but it didn’t pay as well, and wasn’t as pleasant for a lad of spirit; so I deserted at Cape Haytien and j’ined a crew of rovers—that is what you call pirates, you know.

“I was in the business for several years, and had made a lot of money and lost it mostly, when I had the bad luck to ship with Blackbeard. What did I do it for? Because he was at the very top of the profession then, and any man was proud to belong to his crew. He was the boldest and cruelest man that ever sailed. Even a Spaniard would have been too good to do some of the things he did. Blackbeard

would have made his own mother walk the plank as soon as he would a merchant captain. The only thing he was afraid of was ghosts. I remember one night off the north coast of Cuba, it blowing a hurricane at the time, and there was two corposants aloft that scared most of us, but Blackbeard laughed at them, and practiced firing at them with his pistol. But all of a sudden he sung out that he was a dead man, and jumped below. I followed him, for all hands were on the quarter deck, the men being afraid to stay forrard or go below on account of the corposants. Blackbeard had locked himself in his cabin and was callin' to me to bring him the rum. When I brought it he told me that he had seen the ghost of a woman sittin' perched on the jaws of the main gaff pointin' at him with her finger, and that I must tell the mate to bring the schooner up into the wind and shake the ghost off.

“Of course I didn't tell the mate, for I

didn't want to have the schooner founder all on account of a ghost that nobody saw except the captain, so I left him in his cabin and went on deck again.

“Blackbeard didn't care to be with other pirates, so he hunted over the river that you must have come up, and built the fort at the landin' place. No one knew about it but him and his crew; he never let a man leave him without swearin' him on the Bible to keep the secret. We used to careen the schooner at the landin'-place when she needed cleanin' or calkin', and this cave was the place where we kept our treasures.

“I don't know when Blackbeard had the rings let into the rock and the line run through them so as to haul a boat out of this pool and back to the daylight. It was done afore my time and I remember thinkin' that the rope was gettin' pretty rotten and might part some day and leave a lot of us anchored here as I've been. It was here that the men used to leave their spare earn-

in's, and you'll find some empty chests yonder that I've seen pretty near full of gold and silver. It's all gone now, for Blackbeard gave the order to take everythin' aboard the schooner and abandon the cave. He probably suspected that the secret had got out, as it was sure to do some day.

"The men, as I was sayin', kept their treasures here, and I've seen pretty near the whole ship's company carousin' and fightin' here by the light of battle lanterns. But Blackbeard had a place of his own further down the cave. He had a big iron gate all across the mouth of the channel, and you can see it now if you look across the water. He always used to go to it alone, lockin' the gate after him, but the last time he went down the channel he never came back."

"Then he must have got out of the cave some other way," I exclaimed, "for he is alive yet."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said the man. "I've been a-hopin' that he'd been cast

away in some place darker than this and had starved worse than I have. That was the only cheerful thought I've had here."

"You must be a pretty bad man to want to have another man suffer," I said.

"Just so," he answered, "I have been middlin' bad, young masters, but you'll see how different I'll be when we get away from here. But I'm not gettin' on with my story.

"I was Blackbeard's servant the last year I was with him. He'd killed both his last two servants, and I didn't care much for the place, but it wouldn't have done to refuse it. Besides, he treated me pretty well, and I had an easy time waitin' on him, and eatin' what was left from his table, and it was a sight better than raw fish. However, he banged me over the head considerable and the last time we came up the river I made up my mind to bolt, and take my chances of reachin' a settlement, for I knew the country hereabouts very well. One day Blackbeard

looked into my bunk and saw that I had made a bundle of my clothes, for I meant to bolt at the very first chance. He must have suspected it and that is the reason he left me here.

“We had taken everythin’ out of the cave, and expected to sail as soon as the job of cleanin’ the schooner’s bottom was finished. Early one morning, Blackbeard ordered me to bring a lantern and take him into the cave. When we got to this place he ordered me to wait for him while he took the skiff and went to his own private cave. You see he always kept a little skiff, just big enough to hold two, for his own use, and the skiff you come in was the one the men used.

“He set me ashore here and then paddled to the iron gate, unlocked it, passed through, locked it again and disappeared. I’ve never set eyes on him or on another livin’ man since, till you come.

“At first I couldn’t believe that he was not

comin' back. Then I thought that he had met with bad luck and couldn't get back, and I kept thinkin' that by and by the men would miss him and come for him, and take me away. But nobody ever came, and that made me think that perhaps he knew another way out of the cave and had left me here to starve.

“Talk about ghosts! I saw whole shiploads of them first along while I was here. They wern't ill disposed, and must have come just out of curiosity, for they never offered to do anythin' except sit and look at me, and whenever I went towards them they would disappear. I was that lonesome that I would gladly have took up with any sociable ghost, and wasn't a bit afraid of them, but I couldn't get one of them to speak. They're a worthless lot — them ghosts; I never could see any use on 'em, anyway.

“I was that weak from starvin' before I found I could catch fish, that I used to fall and stave in my head against the rocks, but

after that I had enough to eat, such as it was.

“If Blackbeard had marooned me on a desert island I wouldn’t have minded, provided I could see the sun, and live on the ground like a man. But he left me here, which was the same as buryin’ me alive, and it was the cruelest thing that ever he did. I’ll never rest till I bring him to the gallows. I’ll knock off piratin’; I’ll give up rum; I’ll even ship aboard a man-of-war, and some day we’ll capture him and he’ll be tried, and old Bill Catchley’ll be the chief witness against him and will swear him to the gallows and stand by and see him swing.”

I haven’t told the old man’s story in exactly his own words, for as you might expect he used pretty bad language, but I never doubted that what he said was true, for Captain Blackbeard was well known to be more of a fiend than a human being.

Tom and I told the old man that if he would help us to escape we would help him.

We told him all that had happened to us, and made him promise that if we could get out of the cave he would neither join the pirates nor deliver us into their hands.

He swore most solemnly that he would do what we asked. He said that if we could get Blackbeard's iron gate open we could escape the same way that he did. He was not surprised to learn that the rope which formerly led through the iron rings in the passage through which we had come had rotted away, and he felt sure that the iron gate must have rusted so much that we could manage to break it open. He had never tried it, for the gate was in deep water, and he could not swim a stroke. One would have thought that he would have taught himself to swim in the hope of escaping by that means, but like most people who cannot swim he thought it was the most difficult instead of being one of the easiest of arts.

When old Bill had finished his story we were as anxious to leave the cave as he was,

and we got into the boat again and paddled over to the iron gate.

The gate was placed at the entrance to another arched passage precisely like the one through which we had come. It was made of stout iron bars an inch thick, and was locked by a big padlock. We found that though the padlock was rusted it was still so strong we could not break it; and the iron bars seemed as strong as if they were new.

But the old man was not in the least discouraged. Indeed he was as cheerful as if he was going to a picnic. He said he would have the gate open in a jiffy. He worked for some time forcing a bit of dry rag into the lock and pulling it out again; and when he thought it was dry enough, he asked for the powder horn, filled the lock with powder, fitted a slow match made of rag, lighted it with the lantern, and asked me to paddle the skiff a short distance away from the gate.

The explosion blew the lock to pieces, and with a little effort we were able to swing

open the rusty gate and enter the passage. The swift current swept us along as before, and we noticed pieces of rotten rope hanging from rings in the side of the passage just as we had in the other one.

“One does learn a sight of useful things piratin’,” said old Bill thoughtfully; “there’s where I learned how to open a padlock without a key, and you see for yourselves, young masters, how handy it come in.”

The channel in which we now found ourselves was short compared with the other one, and in a few moments we had shot through it and had reached another open space with quiet water. There was no daylight here, but by the light of the lantern we could see a landing place on our left, where we hastened to land, hoping that we had reached the end of our underground voyage. As the skiff came up to the shore she struck on what we found to be a sunken boat which Bill immediately recognized as the boat once belonging to Blackbeard.

CHAPTER V.

LOST IN THE LABYRINTH.

WE landed on a little rocky platform close to a narrow passage not much larger than the companion-way of the Swansea, which led into what was evidently the dry part of the cave. We followed this passage a little distance, finding it widening all the time till we came to a great gallery, wide and high, in which there stood three wooden chests. Two of them were open and empty, but the third contained a great quantity of excellent candles of all sorts; some of them were of wax and at least two feet long, and must have been stolen from some church altar. In the empty chests Blackbeard had doubtless kept his treasure, for I picked up, close to the chests, a small piece of gold which

had been dropped there. But I was more pleased to see the candles than I should have been to have found the chests full of diamonds, for I knew our lantern must be nearly burnt out, and that without a light we should never be able to find our way out of the cave.

“There’s a way out of here,” said old Bill, “and we’ll find it if the candles last long enough. It’s this way, you see: Blackbeard has been here and took away his treasure. Now, he didn’t take it away in the skiff, for that he sunk, and he must have sunk it on purpose. Besides, I saw where the water runs out of this pool, and the channel is too small for the skiff. So, you see, there’s a way out of the cave that Blackbeard knowed of, and all we’ve got to do is to follow it.”

There was so much reason in what he said that I felt quite easy about our escape. But by this time Tom’s arm had begun to pain him a good deal. It was swollen and stiff. He made light of it, but I could see

that he was feverish and tired, and I wanted to save him from any unnecessary work. So I told him that Bill and I would leave him to rest while we searched for the way out of the cave, and that as he had plenty of candles he need not feel lonesome. Tom was very ready to rest, and said that he would lie down and try to sleep awhile.

While we were talking the lantern suddenly went out, and I had great difficulty in lighting a candle with the flint and steel, for my tinder was damp. But I succeeded at last, and lighted three candles—one for each of us. Then Bill and I stuffed some biscuits in our clothes, and leaving the guns and everything else with Tom, we set forth to explore the cave.

At first we had no trouble, for all we had to do was to follow the gallery we were in, but presently we came to other galleries, great and small, leading out of it, and we could not tell which one to follow.

However, we chose a large one and fol-

lowed it for about half a mile, as nearly as I could judge. It was very crooked, and we very soon were so confused by its many windings that we could not tell in which direction we were going. Then we came to more galleries, leading out of the one in which we were. Sometimes we would follow one of these till we would come to the end of it and would have to turn back; and once, after wandering for miles, we came to a place where we could see our footprints in the sand, and so perceived that we had made no progress during all that time, but had only got back to the place from which we had started an hour before.

The floor of the cave was for the most part covered with dry sand, but occasionally it was wet and muddy. In one of these wet places I slipped and dropped my candle into the water, so that now we had only one left. We were getting rather tired, but there was nothing for it but to keep on till we could find our way out.

We had talked together very briskly when we first started, but now that we had become uneasy neither of us cared to talk. We knew that we were lost in an enormous cave, that we had only one candle, and that unless we could find the outlet, or the place where we had left Tom, we should be almost certain to die in the dark. But neither of us cared to say so lest we should discourage the other; so we trudged on in silence.

I began to think how frightened Tom would be if his candle should burn out while he was asleep, and he should wake up in the darkness; but I remembered that he had the flint and steel, for I had accidentally left them on the lid of a chest, near the biscuit, and that he would be sure to find them. Of couse he would be alarmed when we did not return, but I felt sure that he would know we had been lost and that he would search for us and perhaps find us before we had perished.

We met nothing that was alive in the cave, except in one large hall, if I may call it so,

where there were thousands of bats. This encouraged me, for I thought that the bats would be sure to live somewhere near the entrance to the cave, so that they could easily fly out; but we could not find any way out of the hall except through the passage by which we had entered it. Once we came to a little stream of water, only an inch or two wide, and we tried to follow it, but it soon lost itself in a crevice of the rock.

We had now tramped so long that we were completely exhausted, and Bill proposed that we should rest a few minutes and eat a bit of cracker. He knew as well as I did that we must not waste the little time that would remain to us before our candle would burn out, but we were too tired to keep on our feet. So we lay down, ate a few mouthfuls, and swallowed a little water from the stream, and then resumed our journey.

“We may be near your brother,” said the old man, all of a sudden. “Let’s hail him, and perhaps he will hear us.”

We shouted at the top of our lungs, but there was no answer except the echoes. For all that I can tell, Tom may have been fifteen miles away.

“How long will the candle burn?” I asked, after we had given up the effort to make Tom hear.

“Well, not more than half an hour,” replied Bill, “and probably it won’t burn that long.”

“Then we must walk faster, for we can’t do anything in the dark.”

We walked as fast as our tired legs would let us, Bill at the same time sheltering the candle with his hand, so that it would not be blown out by the wind caused by our movements. Still there seemed to be no end to the cave; there were hundreds of bewildering passages. At last Bill stopped. The candle was now too short to be held in the fingers; he placed it on the ground.

“You mustn’t be disheartened, young master,” said the old man, “but the time’s

come when we can't do no more, but wait till your brother comes for us. I'm going to turn in and take a sleep; and if you'll take my advice you'll do the same thing."

So saying, the old man stretched himself on the sand and fell asleep at once. I followed his example, but I could not sleep, for I could not take my eyes off the candle. It was so horrible to think that in a few moments we should be in the darkness. I thought of the poor miners that are sometimes buried alive, and knew how they must dread to see their lamps burn out.

The candle burned longer than I thought it could. All the wax melted, and the little piece of wick fell over in a pool of hot wax, but still it continued to burn. Suddenly the flame vanished, and a dim little spark smouldered for a while and then went out, leaving us in total darkness.

I was so very tired, that in spite of my misery I fell asleep, and have no idea how long I slept. I woke up finally feeling

rather stiff, and in a low voice asked Bill if he was awake. He said he had been awake a long while, but that he had not moved for fear of disturbing me.

"We're in an awful scrape," I said to my companion, "and you were a good deal better off before we found you, for you weren't altogether in the dark."

"But I was all alone, young master," Bill replied, "and I'd a great sight sooner be here alongside of a human being than stark alone in my old cave. And don't you get faint-hearted. We'll get out of this, yet."

I did not answer, for I had nothing to say, and after a little the old man said,

"Mayhap you can lay your hand to a prayer or two, young master. You've been brought up ashore."

I was astonished and ashamed that I who had been piously brought up should be advised to pray by a wicked old pirate. It is true I had already prayed that we might

be delivered from our great danger, but I had been ashamed to pray out loud.

"Certainly I know some prayers, Bill," I said.

"Then," said he, "if you'll kindly shove ahead with them, I'll take my turn when you're through. You ought to come before me, being a young gentleman, and handy with prayers; whereas, I don't know a single prayer except one that I knocked together myself when I was alone here, before you came, and I know it ain't very ship-shape. But then, you see I never had any bringin' up, and of course pirates don't carry chaplains along with them."

I kneeled down in the dark and prayed aloud to God to have mercy on us and bring us once more to the blessed daylight.

When I had finished I could hear Bill getting upon his knees, and then he said, "Lord, if you'll only get me out of this I'll turn over a new leaf and never go to sea again, except in an honest trade. Amen."

"I know very well," said Bill, "that it ain't a first-class prayer, but it works well, and it's bound to get us out of here. Now, if we only had a Bible, and a candle to read it by, we'd be as nice and comfortable as you could wish."

"Bill," said I, "that piracy was an awful business. How could you have ever followed it?"

"Well, I know it wasn't right, and I'm never goin' back to it again, for I've passed my word, and what I've said I sticks to. But, you see, I'd made a cruise in a man-of-war, and two or three cruises in a privateer, and I couldn't see much difference between them and a pirate. However, that's all done with now, and I'm goin' to lead an honest life, and I'll get a wife as can read the Bible, and I'll knock off rum, and I'll get a berth as sextant of a church yet, you see if I don't."

I couldn't help remembering that Bill had talked quite differently when we first met him, but perhaps he was excited then, and

did not mean all he said. Of course I could not agree with him that piracy was not much worse than privateering or any other lawful business, but it would have been foolish to expect an old and ignorant pirate to have right ideas about everything. However, I couldn't help but see that in one thing this poor old man was better than I was, for he was not ashamed to pray, and I had been ashamed to propose such a thing to him. So I learned one useful lesson of him, at any rate.

Of course we could not tell whether it was day or night, and indeed in that dark place, it made little difference which it was, but I felt sure that Tom must be awake, and must be in search of us. I proposed to Bill that we should call out at the top of our voices every few minutes, and he agreed to it; but just as we were going to begin we heard a dull noise, that echoed for several minutes, so it seemed to us, through the cave.

“That’s Tom’s gun,” I exclaimed. “Now, Bill, let’s answer him.”

We both called “Tom!” as loud as we possibly could; then after waiting till I had counted two hundred we called again. We had done this perhaps half a dozen times when we heard Tom’s voice answering us, and after a long time he found the way to us with a light.

Though he was slow he always had good judgment, and when he found that we did not come back, he knew our candles must be burnt out and that we were helpless in the dark. So he loaded himself down with candles and came in search of us. He had also brought some more biscuit, for he knew we must be hungry.

We ate the biscuit and then set out to find our way back to the landing-place to get the other gun, for, on account of his wounded arm, Tom had only brought one gun; and as he insisted that he could find the way back without any trouble, we re-

solved to go back, get the gun, and take a fresh start.

"How are you going to find the way back?" I asked Tom, feeling a little doubtful if he could do it.

"Easy enough," he answered. "Every time I made a turn while I was looking for you I made a mark on the side of the cave with a candle."

"That's what we ought to have done, only we didn't think of it," said I.

"It's what Blackbeard did, for he wouldn't have taken the chance of losing himself," said Bill. "If his marks are on the rocks yet all we'll have to do is to follow them."

Tom led us back without much trouble to the landing-place, for at every turn we found a smear of candle grease pointing in the way we were to go. We took the gun, and as many more candles as we could carry, and began to search the sides of the cave for Blackbeard's marks.

We could find no marks made by candles,

but before long we found a cross scratched in the rock, where another gallery opened out of the one we were in, and after that we always found the same mark whenever we came to a fresh turning.

We had not traveled a long distance, perhaps not more than half a mile, when we saw daylight. It was very dim at first, but as we approached it the cave gradually lighted up, and soon we came to an opening through which we could see the blue sky.

It was a small opening, just large enough for a man to squeeze through, but when we had passed through it we found ourselves on a side hill that was covered with a thick growth of bushes. In the valley below we saw the tops of great trees, and in one place we caught a glimpse of a bit of water. This time I was not afraid, but I fell on my knees and thanked God that we were safe.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD BILL'S RAID.

"WE'RE out of the cave, sure enough, but what are we to do now?" asked Tom.

"We'll find the fort, and if the pirates have gone, and haven't taken our boat with them, we'll start for Charleston," I answered.

"But how on earth are we going to find the fort?"

"Young masters," said Bill, "there's water yonder, and what we want to do is to make for it. Whenever a man's in trouble ashore, with constables or anything else, let him make for blue water. That's what I've learned by experience, and I know it's right."

"Very well," said I, "come along, then, and don't waste any time." And so, with

Bill carrying one of the guns, while I carried the other, we started for the water.

Bill marched straight on through the woods, without turning either to one hand or the other, and we soon came to a small river.

"Now the question is," said I, "whether this is our river, and whether we should go up or down it."

"It's sure to be the river that you come up when you come ashore," said Bill. "If it isn't then it's some other river, and it runs into the sea, and we're pretty near the mouth of it now."

"How can you tell that?" I asked.

"Look at the trees," he answered. "Don't they all have a list up-stream? It's the sea-breeze blowin' up the valley that does that, and you don't get the sea-breeze very far inland. What we want is a raft so as we can float down without breakin' our way through the thick underbrush."

I was convinced that the old man was

right, and we all three began to search for timber with which to make a raft. Not having any tools but a pocket knife we could not cut logs, but we found a dead trunk of a tree with very few branches, and managed to launch it. Then we pulled up some young saplings and lashed them across the tree with vines, so that it would not roll over and over in the water. Our raft, when it was finished, was the most awkward and clumsy raft ever built, but it would float us, and that was all we wanted.

It must have been about five or six o'clock in the morning when we came out of the cave, and it was noon by the sun, when we shoved off the raft and started down the river. We all sat with our feet drawn up on the big log, and tried to steer the raft with poles. There was not much current and the raft floated very slowly. Still we managed to keep it somewhere near the middle of the stream, and the high trees on the banks shaded us, so we did not feel the sun.

Tom took the opportunity to bathe his wounded arm and breast, and we were delighted to see that although his arm was still stiff the wounds were healing fast.

We were nearly all the afternoon on the raft, but at last we saw a column of smoke some way ahead of us, so we worked the raft to the shore and made it fast.

"That smoke's black," said Bill, "which means that somebody is burnin' tar."

"Who is it?" I asked.

"It's the pirates," Bill replied. "They've brought up the schooner and careened her and are payin' her seams with pitch; so they're ashore yet."

"Shall we creep down through the woods and see if we can find the boat?"

"Not till dark, or else they'll be middlin' sure to catch us."

"But," said I, "we can't find our way through the woods after dark."

"That's so," replied Bill. "Give me a few minutes to think this thing over."

Presently he said, "There's two ways, young masters. One is for me to leave you here and go right among the pirates. They'll treat one of Blackbeard's men well, never you fear. I could let on that I meant to join them, and could get some clothes, and then after dark I could take the best boat and scuttle the others, and pull up after you."

"What's your other plan?" asked Tom.

"Just to leave you here," said Bill, "while I sneak down and try to steal the boat without being seen. There's just one reason why the first plan ain't a tiptop one," he continued. "You see, I might get drunk and not get back here until you had got tired of waitin'. I've promised to knock off rum, but they'll give it to me, naturally; and if I don't take it they'll believe that I'm tellin' them a yarn about havin' been a pirate myself; and if I do take it then I break my word, and I won't answer for bein' sober again till I get to sea."

"Then you mustn't go among them," I said. "You would be going straight into temptation, and now that you've turned over a new leaf that wouldn't do."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, young master," exclaimed Bill, "so we'll give that plan up. Now, I'll just work my way along the bank and see what I can do toward carryin' off a boat. No; you needn't come along, for two would make twice as much noise as one. I'll be back by midnight, anyway; and if I don't, why, you'll know that they've captured me, and you'll have to try what you can do without me."

The old man tied his rags around his waist and started on his dangerous expedition. I was astonished to see how easily he made his way through the bushes and among the thick trees with so little noise, and felt that if anybody could approach the pirates without being discovered, it was he.

It was long after midnight before Bill returned, and then he startled us by suddenly

appearing in the moonlight, dressed in a new shirt and trousers, and wearing a hat. However, we knew him by his beard, and were only frightened for a moment.

He told us that he had watched the pirates for hours while he was hid in the bushes. They were busy calking the schooner, which was careened at the landing place. When they knocked off work some of them went in swimming, and he managed to steal one man's clothes while he was in the water.

"It looks a little like piratin', this carryin' off another man's clothes," said Bill thoughtfully, "but I don't think it ought to be counted against me. These clothes are brand-new, you see, and they've been stole out of some Frenchman's chest, for they're made of French flannel, while the chap who was good enough to leave them where I could get them when he undressed, was an Englishman."

Bill could not get our boat because it was nowhere to be found, and from what he

heard the pirates say, a party had taken her and gone down to the lagoon to fish. All the schooner's boats were hauled up on the shore under the trees, and they were so heavy that it would have taken three or four men to launch one of them. So there was nothing to be done but for us to wait until the next night, and then make another attempt to recapture the boat.

The next morning we were very hungry, for all our provisions were gone and we had nothing for breakfast except berries. Perhaps we could have shot something, for the woods were full of game, but the pirates would have heard us if we had fired a gun, and then all chance of getting a boat would have been lost.

Toward the end of the afternoon Bill set out a second time for the pirate's fort, but this time I insisted on going with him, and I took my gun. He would not take a gun, for he said it would be of no use unless he meant to fight, and he wasn't fool enough to

fight a whole crew of pirates. However, I felt easier in consequence of having a gun with me, though, as it turned out, I did not have to use it.

We hid ourselves in a place where we could see everything the pirates did and hear most that they said. Our boat was lying at the landing, but it was directly in sight of the pirates, and it was impossible to make any attempt to get it until after they should be asleep. Bill said that they never set a watch at night except when at sea, and they would all be sound asleep by midnight.

And so it happened. Long before midnight they all went into the fort, with the exception of two young fellows, and were soon asleep. The two pirates who remained outside walked up and down talking together in a low tone for an hour or two, and then they fetched their blankets from the fort and lay down in the shade of one of the schooner's boats — for there was nearly a full moon, and every one knows that in tropical coun-

tries it is dangerous to sleep in the moonlight.

We waited until we thought they were asleep, and then Bill cautiously crept out from our hiding-place, telling me to remain concealed until he could cast the boat loose and bring it around a bend in the river.

One of the two men who were lying on the ground was wide awake, and when he saw Bill walking toward the landing he called out, "Who's that?"

I was sure now that Bill would be captured and I grasped my gun and cocked it.

"None of your business," replied Bill. "Who are you, anyway?"

"I'm Sandy Burns," replied the man. "You needn't be so uppish if you are a bos'n."

It was plain that the pirate thought that Bill was the boatswain of the schooner, and I began to hope that he might escape, after all.

"Who's uppish?" exclaimed Bill. "Can't

a man leave the blazin' hot fort and come down here for a swim without being hailed as if he was a constable? "

The man said no more, and Bill going straight to his boat undressed and threw his clothes into her.

Instead of trying at once to carry off the boat, he dropped into the water, clinging to the boat so that he could not be seen from the shore. He remained a long time in the water before he climbed into the boat, and then he leisurely cut her loose and rowed quietly up-stream.

The man who had hailed him was evidently sound asleep, but if he had been awake, Bill told me that he should have pretended that he had taken the boat so that he could dive from her in deep water.

As soon as Bill started with the boat I followed along the bank until I reached the bend of the river, where I found the boat waiting for me. Bill was already dressed, and in high glee, and each of us taking an

oar sent the boat along at a fine rate. We soon came to where Tom was sleeping, and rousing him up took him into the boat.

"We've got to make the best of our time to-night," old Bill told us, "and hide the boat in the bushes to-morrow, so that if the pirates chase us they won't find us. But I don't believe they'll chase us. They won't ever suspect that any one has carried off their boat."

"Why, they'll see that the boat is gone in the morning; they can't help but see it," I said.

"Of course they'll see it, but they'll lay it to the bos'n. That fellow that hailed me will say that he saw the bos'n come down for a bath and saw him put his clothes in the boat. Most likely he'll say too that he saw the bos'n pull about the river in the boat so as to find a good divin' place. Then everybody will b'lieve that when the bos'n come ashore he didn't make the boat properly fast and so she drifted away. Natu-

rally they'll think she drifted down-stream, so they'll send down-stream for her, and when they can't find her they'll think she has drifted out to sea, and they'll take it out of the bos'n."

"What will they do to him, do you think?" I asked.

"Oh! they'll shoot him, or maroon him, or give him three or four dozen. It depends on how much the captain wanted this boat. I wouldn't be in that bos'n's skin to-morrow, not for a good bit of money."

Not only had we got back our own boat, but there were a quantity of useful things in her. There were half a dozen fishing lines, a hatchet, a breaker of fresh water, and a big knife, that had been used to clean fish. Then there was a bag of biscuit, and a small grapnel, and a mast and sail. Tom and I were in excellent spirits, and old Bill seemed to be perfectly happy, especially whenever he thought of the unfortunate boatswain.

"I don't understand," said Tom, "why we are pulling up-stream. We can't get to Charleston this way, and we shall only get further and further away into the wilderness."

I left Bill to answer this question, for I didn't understand either why we had continued up-stream after we had taken Tom into the boat.

"Them pirates," replied Bill, "will be sure to search for the boat down-stream, and if we had gone that way they would have caught us sure. Now, supposin' they do suspect us and follow us, we shall have a whole day's start of them, and they'll give up the chase before they can find us."

"But how are we to get out of this river?" I asked.

"Don't you fear about that," he answered; "I know all this country and have cruised on this very river. We follow it up till we come to a big fresh-water lake, then we turn to the south'ard and coast along for a couple

of days till we come to another river and we follow it down to the sea. We shall then be only a matter of fifty or a hundred miles to the south'ard of where we are now, and we can then shape a course for Charleston."

"And shall we find plenty to eat?" asked Tom.

"We'll find all the fish we want, but we'll have to be sparin' of the powder, for you haven't got more than a dozen charges in that horn, and we may want them for somethin' better than shootin' game."

"But we sha'n't meet any more pirates," said I.

"No, I don't expect we will; but we may meet savages — Injins and such — and they're not much better than pirates. But you leave it to me; I know the channel, and I'll take you through safe."

I was rather cast down to find that after escaping from pirates we were in danger of falling into the hands of savages, but we had been preserved from so many dangers

that I could not help believing that we should be brought safely to Charleston at last. So I gave up thinking about it and bent my back to the oar, and pulled so strong that Bill, who was pulling the bow oar, had hard work to keep the boat straight.

CHAPTER VII.

INTO THE EVERGLADES.

WE rowed till daylight and then hauled the boat out of the water and hid her in the bushes. We slept the greater part of the day and made a splendid supper of fish that we caught in the stream and cooked over a fire that we built in a hollow a long way back from the river, where there was little risk that the smoke would be seen by the pirates, should they attempt to follow us.

That night we slept under the boat, covering ourselves with the sail, and in the morning, as we were now sure that the pirates were not in chase of us, we started by daylight to find the lake of which Bill had spoken.

We were four days on the river without

meeting with any adventures. We rowed by day, slept by night, and lived on broiled fish. Tom's arm healed up so that he could do his share of the work, and we were as happy as if we had been on a pleasure cruise.

Old Bill seemed a little uneasy at first and we found out that it was on account of his clothes. He had become so used to wearing nothing but a few rags twisted around his waist, that clothes made him feel uncomfortable. So he said that if we didn't object he would put on his rags again and keep his clothes to wear when we should reach a settlement. Of course Tom and I did not care, so the old man made himself comfortable once more.

We found that he knew all about the woods — a thing hardly to be looked for in a sailor; but from some hints that he dropped I felt sure that at some time he had been marooned in a place where there was a great forest, and as he would not speak of it, he

had probably done something to deserve marooning which he considered disgraceful. However that may be he could tell the points of the compass by studying the bark and branches of trees and could make his way swiftly and silently through thick brush that I could not have passed through without making almost as much noise as an elephant. He knew precisely where to look for fish, and when we went ashore he would look carefully for signs of some sort and would then tell us that there were no savages about. Once however he told us that ten or twelve Indians had crossed the river two days before. How he knew this I have no idea, but I am sure he was right.

On the fifth day we came to a lake so large that in some places we could not see the opposite shore. The lake was shallow, and though there was not much breeze, there was a sea that constantly broke, and that would have made us very wet had we not kept the boat's head to it. On the beach,

near the entrance to the river up which we had come, we saw four great alligators lying asleep, huge ugly beasts, smelling strongly of musk, and, doubtless, ready to drown us had they awakened and found us within their reach.

The breeze was blowing from the west, and we had to sail down or up the lake — whichever way may be called down or up — toward the south. But near the shore the sea was breaking, and we could not present the side of the boat to it without getting a great deal of water into her, so we rowed out into deeper water before we hoisted sail.

We ran down the lake under full sail, which was rather more than the boat should have carried in such a breeze. Bill stood at the steering oar, and Tom and I sat up to windward, and got our backs well wet with the spray. We sailed very fast, keeping about a quarter of a mile from the shore, except in places where the shallowness of the water compelled us to keep further out.

“Young masters,” said the old man, “do you want to be rich — very rich : richer than Blackbeard ever was ? ”

“If we could be rich honestly,” said I, “of course we should like it. Who wouldn’t ? ”

“Then, unless the Injuns find us, we’ll be worth thousands of guineas before the sun goes down to-night.”

“We look like it, don’t we ? ” said Tom. “Are the guineas in your pocket, Bill, or are they lying on the shore waiting for us to stop and pick them up ? ”

“They’re ashore, not far from here, young master; and they’ve been waiting many a long year for you and Master Jack and me.”

I wondered if the old man was crazy, but presently he explained what he meant.

“About seven years ago I came here with a captain who knew just where a big chest full of gold was buried. I don’t know who buried it or how the captain knew about it, but he wasn’t the man who buried it.

“As I was telling you, there’s another

river to the south'ard of us that is an outlet of this lake. The captain and me and three men pulled up this river and come to where the chest was buried. He had the bearin's of it on a piece of paper, and I remember them as if it was yesterday. You start from a big tree, with a cross cut on it, and measure twenty-one paces towards a clump of three trees, steerin' for the middle one of the three. 'Then you dig, and right there under your feet is the chest.'

"But how can it be there now if you found it seven years ago?" asked I.

"Because, you see, we weren't allowed to take it away. We had just marked the spot, and was goin' to dig when a lot of Injuns opened fire on us. We couldn't see but one or two of them, for they kept hid behind the trees, but there must have been twenty or thirty of them. They killed the captain and two of the men, and wounded another one before we could get ready to fight them. The wounded man and me made a rush for

the boat and shoved off. There was a good breeze blowin', just as there is now, and we made sail in her and stood up the lake. We didn't dare to come back, but luckily we found Blackbeard's river, and got down to the open sea again. The man that was with me died while we were on the river, and when I was picked up by a coaster I never said nothing about the treasure, and let the coaster's crew believe I'd been shipwrecked. There ain't a livin' soul that knows about that chest except us, and if we've any luck we'll have it aboard this boat to-night."

This story did not seem very improbable, for pirates often buried their treasure in out-of-the-way places. There could be no doubt that the treasure of which Bill spoke had been buried by pirates, and of course they had come by it through robbery and murder, but unless we could find the real owners of it, which seemed impossible, I could see no good reason why we should not keep it

if we could find it. For my part I believed Bill's story, and already looked on myself as rich; but Tom said that he didn't believe that any chest had ever been buried near the lake, and that if it had the Indians had found it long ago.

We reached the end of the lake after a long sail, and entered a sort of river or long narrow bay flanked by low islands, with smaller channels opening between them.

"This is what sailors calls the Everglades," said Bill. "There's hundreds of miles of islands and channels here, clean down to the lower end of Florida. And there's wild beasts and snakes and Injuns and fever. I always expected to come back here for that chest, but I don't like the place, and I hope I'll never have to see it again."

We sailed on for a mile or two further, the wind hauling further aft all the time, and then Bill took in the sail, and we got out the oars, Bill having muffled them with rags so that they should make no noise in

the rowlocks. Having used up his rags in this way he was obliged to put on his shirt and trousers, which pleased me, for he looked like such a frightful savage when half-naked.

He told us to talk only in a whisper, and to keep near the left shore so that the trees would partly hide us. He pulled the stroke-oar this time, for he had to steer the boat himself, as Tom did not know the channel, and while he rowed he kept a sharp lookout all about us. He had both the guns lying in the bottom of the boat where he could lay his hand on them, but I think he put them there mainly to keep them out of our reach, so that we could not fire them incautiously, for he never wanted to fight with Indians or pirates if he could escape without fighting.

By four o'clock we reached an island where we stopped rowing, and Bill steered the boat into a little cove so completely surrounded with bushes that a savage might have stood within a yard of the boat with-

out seeing it. Then we went ashore and searched for Bill's landmarks.

The big tree was there, and Bill showed me something that might have been a cross cut in the bark, though it was now hardly visible because of the growth of the bark. Then he showed me three trees standing close together about fifty yards from the tree with a cross. Between these two landmarks the island was quite clear of trees and large bushes, so that it was easy to measure off twenty-one paces.

"Now," said Bill, after we had made the measurement, "right under us lies our fortin'. We'll share and share alike, young masters, won't we?"

"Certainly we will," I replied.

"Better give Bill a good half of the lot," said Tom. "That is, if there is any money there, which I will believe when I see it. It's more Bill's than ours, by rights."

"No, no," said the old man. "You took me out of the cave and I took you here.

So share and share alike's the right thing. But don't let's waste any more time, but let's dig this minute."

"All right," said Tom, "but what are you going to dig with?"

We had not thought of this before, but we had absolutely nothing to dig with except a hatchet; so we saw that before we could do anything we must cut some sharp sticks to use as spades. It was not easy to find any sticks which we could use for this purpose, since we did not want to cut down and trim a whole tree to make one stick.

We wandered some distance from the boat while we were searching for our sticks, and at last we saw, lying in a heap on the ground, just the sticks we wanted. But Bill was not at all pleased to see them.

"Don't touch 'em," he whispered to me. "They belong to the Injuns, and there must be a village close to us. If they catch sight of us they'll scalp us, sure."

In fact there was a narrow path leading

from the pile of sticks into the forest, and Bill proposed that we should follow it and see if there were any Indians in the neighborhood.

"You see," said he, "the path hasn't been used lately, for the new grass is growing in it. That means either that the Injuns don't come this way very often, or else they used to have a village here last winter and have gone somewhere else this summer. Any way, the best thing for us to do is to find out just how things are before we go to diggin' and get fired on as I was the other time."

We followed the path as silently as we could. We dropped on all-fours when the bushes were so low that our heads would show above them; we walked on tiptoe the rest of the way. After walking nearly half a mile we came to a large open place where there was every sign that there had once been an Indian village, but which was now entirely deserted. Naturally we were greatly relieved,

and ventured to talk in our natural voices, being still careful, however, not to make any unnecessary noise.

“They’re gone, that’s certain,” exclaimed Bill, “and now, perhaps, we can dig without being interfered with. We’ll go back, now, and get our sticks and go to work.”

We sharpened three good-sized sticks, and when we had reached the place where the treasure was buried Bill once more paced off twenty-one paces and we began to dig.

It was slow work, for while we could break up the earth with the sticks, we had to stop every little while and scoop the loose dirt up in our hands. As we could not be quite sure that Bill’s paces were the same length as those of the man who buried the treasures, we dug a long hole — say six feet long by eighteen inches wide — so as to allow for any reasonable difference in measurement. By and by my stick broke off so many times that it was useless, and both Tom and Bill’s sticks were worn so dull that they needed

to be sharpened. By this time we had made our hole not more than a foot deep and were beginning to get very tired.

"How deep must we dig, Bill?" said I.

"I can't rightly say. As a general rule, when a man buries a chest in the sand he buries it about six feet deep, and I suppose this chest lies about that deep."

"Then we must sharpen up our sticks before we work any more," said Tom. "And, come to think of it, we left the hatchet by the woodpile, and I'll go back and get it."

"You won't go alone," said I. "We must not run the risk of being separated."

So we all walked back to the pile of sticks, and I selected a new one, and we sharpened all three with the hatchet that Tom had carelessly left on the grass.

"We'll get on faster if we make something like a real spade," said Bill. "I don't believe there's any Injuns about here, and if there are we've got to take the risk of their hearin' us. I'm goin' to chop down that

there young tree yonder and make a spade while you take a rest."

Tom and I sat down on the grass and watched the old man at his work. He chopped away as if he had forgotten all about the Indians, and made noise enough to have been heard half a mile away.

In the course of half an hour Bill had finished his spade.

"Now," said he, "you may think I've wasted time with this, but you'll find we'll get the chest out sooner than we would if we'd kept at work with nothing but sticks."

Bill put his spade on his shoulder and Tom and I rose up ready to follow him. Tom had just stooped to pick up the hatchet, which Bill had left for him to carry, when six savages armed with guns stepped suddenly out from behind the bushes. Two of them seized Bill's arms; the rest stood quietly by looking at Tom and me and ready to shoot us down if we made the least attempt to escape.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRISONERS.

It would have been foolish for us to try to resist our captors, and we neither did nor said anything, except that Bill whispered cautiously, "Keep quiet, young masters; it's our only chance."

The two Indians who had seized Bill by the arms marched off with him, and Tom and I followed close behind with the rest of their number. We walked slowly, for Bill had suddenly become very lame, and walked with his left knee perfectly stiff. In about a quarter of an hour we reached a clearing where there was an Indian village, consisting of twenty or more huts made by covering a framework of poles with skins and old blankets. One large hut was covered with

canvas, which must have been part of a ship's sail.

A crowd of savages, who were chiefly women and children, came to meet us, and surrounded us as we stood waiting to see what would be our fate. Some of the women made hideous faces at us, but they behaved decently compared with a horrible old man, with a painted face, and a row of sharks' teeth hung around his neck, who spit in our faces, and several times made believe to stab us with his long sharp knife.

After talking about us for a while the Indians took us to a hut where they bound us hand and foot with pieces of rope, making us sit down on the ground and tying our feet together and then tying our wrists under our knees. Then they placed a guard at the entrance of the hut and left us to ourselves.

"I've been lashed up in Blackbeard's cabin two days at a time in just this fashion," said Bill. "I wonder if they learned it of him.

These bits of rope come from some wreck they've plundered. I hope it was Black-beard who was wrecked."

"What will they do with us, Bill?" asked I.

"They mean to torture us in the morning and then they'll kill us. Most likely they'll burn us at the stake. But they hain't done it yet, you know, and they won't if we can get away to-night."

"Much chance of our getting away," exclaimed Tom.

"It don't look much like it," said Bill, "but more unlikely things has happened. Master Jack knows a clipper of a prayer, and I know a sort of one, and probably you know one. I propose that we all turn to and take a spell at prayin'. It may fetch us out of this, for it fetched us out of that cave."

We were all silent for a long while, and I don't believe that more earnest prayers were ever said than those that were offered in that hut by old Bill the pirate, and his two miserable companions.

“Our being tied up don’t matter much,” said I, after a while, “for I could always slip my hands through any rope that was tied around my wrists, and, if that Indian would move away from the door for five minutes I would undertake to have our feet and hands free in less than that time.”

“Why, now I told you we weren’t killed yet by no manner of means. The only thing that troubled me was these lashin’s, for I couldn’t see my way to get out of this camp so long as we couldn’t move hand or foot. But don’t you move yet a while, Master Jack. Wait till night, when them heathens will be asleep. We’re safe to be left here till mornin’, and if we can manage that chap that is keepin’ guard over us, we can walk out of here some time to-night.”

“Then you think we will have to lie here till the Indians are asleep?” said I.

“Of course we will, and if you’ll take my advice you’ll heave a groan now and then, just as if you were sufferin’ terribly and had

no hope of gettin' off. Oh! I know them savages. Nothin' pleases them so much as to see a feller suffer. I'd like to serve that medicine man out, though, before we go."

"What is a medicine man?" I asked.

"He's a sort of Indian parson and fortin'-teller and doctor," replied Bill. "That chap with the sharks' teeth is the medicine man, and he'll be for puttin' us to the worst kind of torture. It was pretty hard to have him spit in your face, and never be able to heave as much as a belayin'-pin at him. But we mustn't let them hear us talk or they'll think we're plottin' somethin'." So saying, Bill groaned in a way that almost made me laugh, and then rolled over on his side and lay perfectly still.

After it was dark the Indians must have built a big fire in the middle of the village, for we could see the light and hear the flames crackle. Bill whispered that they were holding a council to decide what they would do with us.

“Or,” he added, “I ought to say how to do it, for they’ll never dream of lettin’ us save our scalps.”

It must have been very late, for the fire had died down and all was quiet when the medicine man came to our tent. He sent away the guard and, entering, sat down and stared at us. He was evidently gloating over his victims, and his sending away the guard meant that he intended to watch us himself.

He was an old man, but for all that he looked as if he was very tough and wiry. Still, I had made up my mind that I would risk freeing my hands, and jumping on him in hopes of getting possession of his knife, and frightening him into keeping quiet while I cut the ropes that held Bill and Tom. It was a mad plan, and would doubtless have failed, but, fortunately, I did not have to try it. The Indian had placed his knife on the ground beside him, probably in order to make us think that he intended to cut our

throats. But he was half tipsy, and, after sitting awhile in the hut, he fell sound asleep.

I quietly slipped my wrists out of the rope, untied the rope from my ankles, and cautiously reached out and grasped the medicine man's knife. Then, without making the slightest noise, I set Tom and Bill free, and handed Bill the knife.

Bill crept noiselessly up to the Indian, and had him by the throat with the point of the knife close to his eyes before the savage knew what was the matter. He had the good sense, however, to remain perfectly still, and it did not take long for me to tie his hands behind his back. Then Bill tore off a piece of his new flannel shirt and made a gag which he lashed on the Indian's mouth so that he could not call for help if he wished to. Finally Bill tied a long rope around the Indian's neck and then told me to cut a slit in the back of the hut and creep out.

We crept out on all-fours, Bill and the

medicine man being the last to leave the hut. Not a soul except ourselves was stirring in the village, and as the hut stood close to the woods we were soon in the shadow of the trees and could stand upright.

"Do you know the way to the boat?" I asked.

"I should think so," replied Bill. "What was I pretendin' to have a stiff knee for except so as to be able to dig my heel into the ground and leave a mark?"

So that was why Bill had suddenly become lame. As he said, we had no difficulty in finding our way back to the wood-pile where we had been captured, and of course we knew the way from there to the boat.

As soon as we reached the boat Bill tied the Indian hand and foot just as we had been tied, and laid him under the thwarts. I supposed that we would lose no time in shoving off, but Bill was still bent upon carrying off the treasure, and he had brought his spade with him from the wood-pile.

"We're safe enough for a while," he said; "you can bet that the medicine man gave orders that nobody should come into our hut while he was there. That's the way they always do. They won't look for him till daylight, and we can get that chest out in a few minutes. Come on now and dig your very best, if you want to be rich men."

I was so anxious to get away from the Indians that I would gladly have abandoned the treasure, and as for Tom, he had never really believed that it was there. However, it did not seem probable that our escape would be discovered for an hour or two at least, so I took the medicine man's knife to dig with, for I had no stick, and we set to work.

In the course of a few minutes I struck something with the point of my knife which proved to be the lid of, not an iron chest as Bill had said, but a small iron-bound one. We had it out in almost no time, and Bill

carried it to the boat without opening it. Then, casting loose, we shoved off.

We rowed about a quarter of a mile up the channel and then Bill tossed his spade into the bushes, where the Indians would be sure to find it. Next he turned the boat around and we rowed rapidly to the southward past the place where we had dug up the treasure chest.

“Them fellows will never think that we are going further south,” said Bill; “especially when they find that spade. They’ll paddle up the lake for a day or two before they give it up, and by that time we’ll be safe at sea.”

“And what are we going to do with our prisoner?” I asked.

“I’d like to string him up to a tree,” replied Bill, “but seein’ as I’ve knocked off piracy for good and all, I’ve knocked off piratical fashions too. We’ll take him with us till we get to the beach and then we’ll turn him loose. He won’t dare to go back to his

tribe after this, for they won't believe in a medicine man that let himself be captured by unarmed prisoners."

The savage lay perfectly quiet in the bottom of the boat, and probably thought that we meant to torture and kill him. He was, I doubt not, greatly surprised when I gave him a bit of biscuit and a drink of water, but he said nothing.

"Now that there was a chest buried there, after all, and we've actually found it, I wonder what is in it?" said Tom. "It can't be gold, that I know, for I lifted it and it don't weigh but very little."

"There's diamonds and rubies and pearls in it—you can be sure of that," replied Bill. "And they're worth a sight more than gold. It stands to reason, don't it, that nobody would bury a chest unless it had treasure in it? I ain't in any hurry to open it, for it's safe in our hands now, and the first thing we've got to do is to get safe to blue water."

It must have been about two o'clock when

we left the Indian village, for it began to grow light very soon after we had begun to row. We rowed steadily for at least four hours, winding in and out among a countless number of islands, so that I began to be afraid that Bill would lose the way.

“No danger of that,” he said, when I spoke to him about it. “It took four of us four hours to pull up from the place where the river leaves the Everglades to the place where the diamonds were buried, and I remember we kept due north by compass. Now we’ve only two oars, but then our boat is lighter than the other boat was, and what it took her four hours to do we ought to do in five. We’ll keep on a while longer, and when we find the river we’ll stop and take a rest. It can’t be far off now.”

Indeed, in what I should think must have been just about five hours of rowing we found the channel turning to the left, and with a very perceptible current, so that there could be no doubt that we were in Bill’s river.

We rowed on a few miles further and then the current became so strong that we let the boat drift, and Bill and I being both very tired of rowing, lay down to take a nap while Tom steered the boat.

When we awoke, and Tom took his turn at sleeping, we got out the oars again and pulled leisurely along. The river was very much like Blackbeard's river, though somewhat smaller, and Bill said it was very much shorter. We met with no adventures while on the river, and saw no signs of savages. Toward the end of the day we came in sight of the sea and found that the river ended in a stagnant pool of water, separated from the sea by a narrow line of sand beach.

"There's goin' to be some heavy work for us," said Bill. "The sea has dammed up the river, and we'll have to haul the boat over the sand. We'll have our supper first, and then camp on the beach till mornin'. There's lots of turtles all along the shore

here, and they're as good eatin' as anythin' that comes to the king's table."

Bill told the truth about the turtles. We caught a good-sized one and broiled it, shell and all, over a fire made of the brush-wood that the river had brought down, and Tom and I agreed that we had never tasted anything so delicious.

We took our prisoner ashore, and tied his feet together with a short rope, so that he could walk very slowly, and gave him a share of our supper. Then we tied him securely for the night, lashing him in the boat, and we were then ready to sleep on the sand.

"Bill," said I, "before we turn in, I, for one, should like to see what's in the chest."

"So should I," said Tom.

"All right then, young masters," said Bill; "we'll have it open in a jiffy, and after that we'll fasten it up again, and divide the diamonds after we get to a settlement. If we divide them now, some-

body will lose his share while we're knocking about in the boat, and I'm willin' to trust Master Jack with chest and all till we go ashore for good."

This was agreed to, and Bill brought the chest out of the boat and proceeded to pry the lid open with his knife. "Those Spaniards," said he, "was always good judges of precious stones, and I don't doubt that at this identical minute the vally of a million pounds is in this chest."

The lid came open easily, and I never again expect to see such a look of dreadful disappointment as came over poor Bill's face. For instead of precious stones, the chest contained nothing but a human skull, mounted with a few shillings worth of old silver.

"It's a Saint's skull!" exclaimed Tom. "Some pirate thought it was a great treasure, and buried it to keep it out of the way of the Indians. I always thought it was strange that pirates should go such a dis-

tance into the woods to 'bury gold, when the beach is always handy."

Bill said not a word, but walked away about a quarter of a mile down the beach and threw himself on the sand, and Tom and I thought that the kindest thing we could do was to leave him alone until morning.



CHAPTER IX.

ON BLUE WATER.

It was very easy to see how the mistake about the buried treasure had been made. Certain Spanish priests, escaping from the Indians, had buried the skull of some Saint which they prized above everything else, and had written down a description of the place where they had buried their "treasure," so that it might be found again. This writing had fallen into the hands of a pirate chief, who had probably captured and murdered the poor priests, and who of course supposed that if anybody buried a treasure it must consist of gold or precious stones.

I will confess that I was greatly disappointed, for it would have been very pleasant to have become suddenly rich, but

I was very young and I did not begin to care so much about it as Bill did; as for Tom, he seemed to think it was a good joke to run so many risks merely to dig up an old skull, and he apparently did not care in the least about losing the fortune that Bill had promised us.

In the morning Bill aroused us early, and said that we must try to launch the boat before the sun should be too hot; so we set to work with a will. We let the medicine man help us, for it was a terrible task to drag the heavy boat through the deep sand. We loosened the rope around his feet, and made him push the boat, which he could do perfectly well with his wrists tied together. But we could never have got the boat through the sand had we not taken out the bottom boards and laid them down for a track over which the keel could slide.

Two hours of hard work were needed before we got the boat to the water's edge; then we had a breakfast of turtles' eggs,

and put a lot more of them into the boat. We filled the breaker with fresh water, and were then ready to start.

The Indian was much surprised when we took off his lashings and told him, by signs, that he was free. I was astonished to see Bill present him with the chest and the skull, for he had seemed very bitter against the medicine man. But we did not care to take the skull with us, and if the Indian wanted it he was perfectly welcome to it as far as I was concerned. The last we saw of him he was walking up the beach with the chest under his arm.

“That skull will bring that chap the worst luck he ever had. Two priests and four men have been killed already on account of it, and we come mighty near being burnt alive. I’ve served that medicine man out now for spitting in my face, and he’ll wish he had never been born before that skull gets through with him.”

This is all Bill ever said about his great

disappointment, and all the time that he was with us he never once mentioned the buried treasure again.

The wind was blowing off shore and there was very little surf; so we launched the boat without any accident. Although we had no compass, the weather was fine, and we had no fear of losing our reckoning so long as we could see the stars at night. Bill advised that we should stand out to sea far enough to be sure that we could not be seen from the shore; for of course we could see the land from a distance when our boat could not be seen by any one standing on the beach.

As Bill was the best sailor of the three he naturally took charge of the boat, though he always treated me as if I was his captain. We ran out to sea under sail for a long distance. When the coast began to look rather dim we hauled up to the northward and started on our voyage to Charleston.

After we had eaten our dinner, Bill said

that he felt very tired and sleepy, and that if I would take the steering oar he would lie down. He stretched himself in the bottom of the boat and fell asleep. I think his disappointment, together with the hot sun on the beach, must have had a bad effect on him, for he did not seem at all like himself.

A boy may learn to handle a boat as well as the most skillful seaman, but to read the signs of the weather can only be learned by years of experience. I could handle the boat, but when a low black cloud gathered in the west, I thought it only meant that we should have a shower, and I paid very little attention to it. Tom had followed Bill's example and was sleeping in the stern sheets, and I was half nodding myself when I heard a strange noise, and, looking to windward, saw an awful sight.

A white wall of water was coming down upon us with a roar that every moment grew louder. One of those terrible tempests which

spring up so suddenly in these southern seas was close at hand. It did not seem possible that the boat could live a moment after the gale should strike us. I called loudly to Bill and Tom, and threw the boat's head up to meet the coming squall ; but the wind had shifted a little, and the change in the boat's course took the breeze out of the sail and left it flapping.

Bill sprang up and saw at once what was the matter. He lowered the sail and unstepped the mast in a moment, calling to Tom and me at the same moment to get out the oars. Then he took the steering oar himself, and heading the boat directly toward the roaring, advancing wall of water, told us to row for our lives.

Tom forgot all about his wounded arm, and we both put our backs into the work till our oars bent. Old Bill stood crouched over the steering oar, and watched the great white roaring swell which was close upon us. "Now give way," he cried, "and never

mind how much water comes aboard. Don't lose your stroke, if you ever want to see land again."

In another moment the gale was upon us. The boat dashed partly over and partly through the sea, but although it filled us half-full of water it did not swamp us; the worst of the danger was over almost in an instant. "Keep her head to it," called out Bill, at the top of his voice, for the wind almost carried his words away from us, "while I bail." So saying, he seized Tom's hat and bailed out the water faster than I had ever seen it done before.

It was a long job to get the boat free of water, but Bill did not stop till it was done. There was as yet but little sea on, with the exception of the one great wave which we had passed, for the wind blew so hard that it kept the sea down. However, we knew that before very long there would be a very ugly sea, and we noticed that although we were rowing hard directly in

the teeth of the wind we were making stern way all the time. I was not surprised, therefore, when Bill said that we must put the boat before the wind while the sea was yet smooth enough to permit us to do so.

The boat's sail was a good-sized lug, but there had been no provision made for reefing it. As, however, we had plenty of small cordage of one sort and another in the boat, including fishing lines, Bill soon made shift to reduce the sail to a mere handkerchief, by cutting away more than half of it, and by partly rolling up and lashing the rest of it; so that when it was set there was no danger but that the boat could carry it before the wind, no matter if it were to blow a hurricane. Then we put her directly before the wind, and taking in the oars Tom and I sat up almost on the gunwale — one on either side of the boat — to keep her from rolling, while Bill steered her.

She started like a racer; she fairly flew before the wind. Tom and I were excited

by the rapid rate at which we were sailing and had gotten over our fright, but Bill looked anxious.

"We're all right now, are we not?" I asked him.

"We've got a good boat under us, and if we handle her careful she'll carry us to England or anywhere else, but it's goin' to blow harder than it blows now, and you can see for yourself it's blowin' us off the coast."

I had not thought of that, but already the land was out of sight, for the air was thick with fine spray, and I saw that we were in danger of being blown hundreds of miles out to sea, with a short supply of food and water and no compass.

"Just take a look at the water breaker, will you," said Bill, "and see if it is tight."

I went forward to where the breaker was stowed and found that it was all right; but when I looked at the bag of sea biscuit, I found it soaked with water, while all but seven of the turtles' eggs were broken,

probably because Bill had stepped on them while working with the mast and sail.

"Seven eggs," said Bill thoughtfully; "if we serve out half an egg a day to each man, that'll be about four days' provisions. It's a good job the water's all right, for if we've got water we can live four or five days without food. So cheer up, my lads; we'll weather this gale and fetch Charleston yet."

Tom groaned at the prospect of only half a turtle's egg a day, for he was rather fond of eating, but there was no help for it, and I knew that he would not grumble when it came to real starving.

The wind blew harder and harder, and by degrees the sea got up until there was great danger that a following sea would come aboard and swamp us. Bill took a strip of canvas that had been cut from the sail, and telling Tom and me to sit one on each side of him, he passed the canvas behind our backs, bringing the ends in front of us, and so made a sort of breakwater that partly

kept out the seas. Still every now and then a sea would strike us on the back and nearly knock the breath out of us, and of course more or less of it would get into the boat. After a while Bill gave me the steering oar while he bailed, and after that he and Tom and I took turns in steering and bailing—two of us being always in the stern sheets to break the force of the seas.

The sun was hidden by clouds and mist, and although we knew that the wind had come from the west we could not tell if it still blew from the same direction, and in consequence we could not feel sure to what quarter of the compass we were drifting. Still Bill was cheerful and said that we might be in a far worse condition than that in which we found ourselves. He had once been in a boat with sixteen men and not a drop of water, he said, and assured us that we should certainly be picked up in the course of a few days.

I will not dwell long on the story of our

wild run before the gale. That we were in great danger all that day and the next night I knew very well, but we were mercifully preserved. Tom and I always felt that we owed a great deal to Bill's skillful seamanship.

The next morning the wind died away almost as suddenly as it had sprung up, and in an hour or two the sea had gone down so that it was no longer dangerous. We were in hopes that we would be able to lay a course for the American coast again, but when the wind came up it came from the northwest, and we knew that it would be useless to try to work the boat to windward.

Bill took advantage of the calm to repair the sail, sewing the part that he had cut off to the rest of the sail with fishing-line, and making holes in the canvas with the point of his knife instead of using a needle. When he had finished his work he set the sail and turned the boat's head to the south.

"We can't work to wind'ard in this boat

and get anywhere while our food and water hold out," said he, "so the best thing we can do is to run to the south'ard and find some island where we can revictual. There's the Bermudas and the Bahamas and the West Indies. They're all somewhere to the south'ard of us, and all we have to do is to stand to the south'ard till we find them; and I don't believe it will be very long before we find them, 'specially if we get a fresh northerly breeze."

The northwest wind sprang up very gently at first, but it soon freshened and the boat slipped on before it at a rate of at least six knots an hour. It was a good steady breeze, and we were able to take turns in sleeping, leaving only one of us to manage the boat.

We saw no land that day, but early the next morning we sighted an island directly ahead of us. We were so hungry that Tom and I suggested that as we were so certain to be on shore in a few hours, we could,

without danger, eat all the turtles' eggs. Bill, however, would not listen to this.

"Sightin' land is one thing," said he, "but makin' it's another. We may be blown off again before we can make a landin', or we may land and find nothin' to eat. Only half an egg apiece for us to-day, young masters, unless we get ashore and find plenty of provisions."

We saw that the old man was right and agreed to follow his advice, although we felt as if we were starving.

But we reached the island before noon and landed on a little beach where trees grew almost down to the water. Tom and I were overjoyed at being ashore once more, but Bill was not so well satisfied. He cautioned us not to make much noise, for pirates often landed on uninhabited islands, and we might find that we had sailed into a nest of pirates.

"We'll all explore the island together," said Bill, "but we'll do it as quietly as we

can till we find out if we are alone here. We've got to find a spring of water here, and I hope we'll find somethin' to eat, but so far I don't see anythin'."

We hauled the boat up on the sand, and taking our guns we entered the woods. The trees and underbrush were so thick that it was plain that nobody had passed through the woods in a long time, and this gave us reason to hope that there were no pirates on the island. But after reaching the top of a steep hill that we had seen from the beach, Bill suddenly stopped and whispered, "I see the spars of a vessel."

He was a little in advance of me, and I cautiously made my way to him. We were just at the top of the little hill and could see below us, in what appeared to be a land-locked cove, the spars of a vessel that I instantly knew to be our old brig the Swansea.

CHAPTER X.

THE SWANSEA AGAIN.

FOR some time we lay flat on the ground with only our heads in sight of any one who might be on board the brig and might be keeping a sharp lookout with a spy-glass; so we felt pretty sure that no one would see us. We could see the greater part of the island, and Bill remembered that he had once before landed there when he was on his first piratical cruise.

There was a long and narrow inlet that reached from the sea nearly to the centre of the island. Here the pirates had a sort of camp or village where they lived when ashore. Sometimes they kept heavy cargoes of vessels in store, waiting for a chance to dispose of them. Bill explained that the

reason that the brig did not go up to the camp was that there was a ledge of rock directly across the channel which a vessel could only pass at high tide, and not even then if she drew more than three feet of water.

It was the habit of the pirates when they came ashore to leave their vessel at anchor just below the reef, with two or three men on board, and to make their way up the inlet in boats. There was a battery, so Bill said, of two twenty-four-pounders, concealed among the trees near the anchorage, and in case a man-of-war should come into the inlet it would be quite easy for the pirates to sink her with a few shots at such short range.

We could not see the camp from where we were, nor the deck of the Swansea, so we took the risk of creeping along the brow of the hill till we could get a better view. There was a small boat lying at the main-chains of the Swansea, but we could not see a soul on board the brig. At the camp

there were two men cooking, and two or three moving lazily about; but it was clear that most of the pirates were still asleep.

There was a schooner lying near the camp, and she was so high out of the water that she could have had nothing in her except the three guns that were on her deck. From her size Bill felt sure that she could only pass over the reef at very high tide, and that she must have been brought up to the camp in order that she might be repaired in some way.

After we had seen everything that we could see we cautiously made our way back again until we were on the side of the hill where the pirates could not see us. Then we got on our feet and went a long way into the woods, where we sat down to talk over our situation.

"We're safe enough here for a while," said Bill. "Pirates when they're ashore are too fond of gettin' drunk and sleepin' all day to care for cruisin' around in the woods.

Unless they were to catch sight of our boat lyin' on the sand, we might stay in these woods a month without bein' roused out by them."

"But we don't want to stay here a month," exclaimed Tom. "We want to get away the first moment we can do so."

"We can't start till after dark," said I, "for if we do some one will be sure to see the boat before she can get out of sight. It stands to reason that the pirates must keep a lookout over the sea, even if they don't over the island."

"Then we'll lie here till night and start as soon as it gets dark," said Tom.

"For my part," said Bill, "I've had enough of cruisin' in a small boat. In course I'm ready to do anythin' that's ordered, but if we're to do any more cruisin' I say let's do it aboard the Swansea."

"So, after all you've said, you want to join the pirates again," said I. "It's hard to believe it of you, Bill."

“Who said anythin’ about jinin’ pirates?” replied he. “What I says I sticks to, and I said no more piratin’ for me, never.”

“Then what do you mean?” asked Tom and I both together.

“I mean this. Here’s the Swansea with no more than two men aboard her, and both of them sure to be snorin’ all night. Here’s three of us, and here’s a boat to take us to the Swansea. Here’s the tide, that’ll begin runnin’ out about six o’clock, and by nine, certain, that schooner can’t pass the reef. Why shouldn’t we go aboard the brig about nine o’clock, heave them two chaps overboard, cut her cable, make sail on her and have everythin’ comfortable? Why, it can be done as easy as anythin’; and if you, young masters, don’t care to try it, I’m game to try it myself, and pick you and the boat up afterwards.”

“What do you say, Tom?” I asked, though from the look in his face I knew what he would say.

“Say!” cried Tom. “I say I’ll go with you two, now, if you say so, without waiting for night.”

“Then it’s settled,” said I. “Bill knows what he’s talking about, and I ask his pardon for thinking for a minute that he meant to turn pirate again.”

“No offense, young master,” replied the old man. “It’ll be many a year before people will believe that a man like me has turned over a new leaf. I don’t blame ’em, for I wouldn’t believe it myself of any pirate I ever knew yet.”

When we came to discuss our project more seriously it did seem rather rash. To be sure we had two guns and a hatchet, and we had no fears that we could not overpower two sleepy pirates. But then we could not be sure that there were only two of them on board the brig. Then how could we make sail on her without making considerable noise, and if the noise should attract the attention of the pirates who were ashore they

would recapture the brig at once and would show us no mercy. But, after all, the risk was no greater than the risk that our boat would be seen and overhauled if we tried to leave the island in her.

I thought of all the difficulties in the way of capturing the brig and getting off clear with her, and I am sure Tom thought of them, too, but we did not speak of them, for we had made up our minds to try it, and when you have once looked a thing in the face and decided that it must be done, it is foolishness to discourage yourself by counting up the obstacles in the way.

We were so determined not to lose the chance of capturing the Swansea by any fault of our own that we did not leave the woods until it began to grow dark. Then we were so hungry that we ate up all our provisions, and a great quantity of bananas that we had found on the edge of the woods. For if we did not succeed in capturing the Swansea we knew very well that we should never

need any more food, while if we did capture her we would be sure to find food enough aboard her.

We had come across a small spring of very good water, and by Bill's advice we filled our water-breaker, for, as he said, it was possible that we should not find any water aboard the Swansea, and he had a sailor's horror of dying of thirst.

We ate our supper in the woods, only going down to the boat to get the turtles' eggs. We felt much more courageous after supper than we had felt before, and I found myself getting very anxious that nine o'clock should arrive. I was troubled by no doubts whatever as to the success of our attack on the brig.

When we thought that it must be about eight o'clock we all went up to the top of the hill again. The brig lay in the darkness where we could hardly make her out except by the appearance of her spars against the sky. There was no light aboard her so far

as we could see, and Bill said that either the men in charge of her were asleep or that they had gone ashore. There were a number of lights at the camp and occasionally we could hear voices. Once the pirates sang part of a song with a long chorus. So it was plain that they were wide awake, although there was no sign that they were keeping any lookout.

It did not seem to me that it would be safe for us to stir as long as the camp seemed to be awake; but Bill thought differently. He said that the chances were that there was not a soul on board the brig, but that if we waited long enough the men whose duty it was to be on board her would return. Then he reminded us that the more noise the people at the camp might make the less they would notice any noise that we might make in getting the Swansea out of the inlet. Besides there was the tide, and it was of the greatest importance for us to get away from the island while the tide was so

low that the schooner could not get across the reef to pursue us. So we resolved that we would not wait any longer, but would start at once.

We went down to the boat where we muffled the oars, and placed our arms where we could lay our hands on them in case of need. It was quite dark when we pushed off, though the stars were bright, and there was a nice fresh, southerly breeze.

Tom and I rowed while Bill steered. He kept close in by the shore and we only spoke to one another in whispers. Tom had the bow oar, and it was agreed that when we reached the brig he was to make our painter fast in the main channels, and that he was then to follow me on board. Bill was to climb on board first and Tom and I were to follow him and obey his orders.

It was a longer pull around the island to the inlet than we thought it would be, but when we came in sight of the brig there was no sign of life on her deck, though there

was a glimmer of a light coming through one of the cabin windows. Bill did not hesitate a moment, but steered straight for the Swansea, and we made the boat fast and climbed on board without the least difficulty. Tom and I left our shoes in the boat, and when we once reached the deck we followed Bill noiselessly as, first forward and then aft, he went, searching the deck thoroughly.

We found no one, and it then occurred to us to look over the side for the boat in which the pirates went to and from the shore. There was no boat but ours anywhere near the brig except one which hung from the davits, so that I at once felt sure that the pirates were ashore and that we were alone. I was just about to speak in a louder tone of voice when Bill who understood what I was thinking of gripped my arm and whispered "Remember the light in the cabin."

It was of course impossible for us to risk cutting the cable until we could make sure that there was no one in the cabin ready to

come on deck and give the alarm. So leaving Tom to watch for any boat that might come from the shore, Bill and I stole down the companion way as quietly as possible. There in the cabin, in the very chair where poor Captain Fearing used to sit, sat his wicked mate, Mr. March, the very man who had stolen the Swansea.

March was sound asleep. His arms were on the table and his head rested upon them.

We crept up to him and Bill had one arm around his chest and his hand on the man's mouth, before he awoke. When he did awake he found that Bill was holding him firmly, that my gun was pointed directly at him, and that it was useless to resist.

"Now you make just the least bit of noise and you're a dead man," said Bill to the mate. "Keep quiet and you won't be hurt; that is, not at present. I'm old Bill Catchley, the same that was shipmate with you in the Ruby, and you know I'm a man of my word."

The mate never offered to say a word

while Bill lashed him fast with the fellow's own silk sash and then gagged him with his cap.

"Now," said the old man, "you're quite comfortable, and you can just lie here where we can keep an eye on you through the skylight. If you offer to move we'll shoot you out of hand; so bein' as you're a sensible sailor-man you'll keep precious still. And now, young master, we'll go on deck and set the men at work."

I was on the point of asking "What men?" when I saw that Bill wanted the mate to think that we had a strong force with us.

On deck we found Tom anxiously watching for the pirates' boat, which, as we feared, might come off to the brig any moment.

"The first thing to do," said Bill, "is to run up the jib and get her head round before we cut the cable. I'll lay out and loose the jib and you'll hoist it; but remember that any noise will bring the pirates on us."

We got the jib up without much noise, though the hanks did rattle in a way that frightened me, and then, after the sheet was trimmed, Bill rushed to loose the foretopsail, telling me to cut the cable the moment the sail filled, and then to sheet home as quickly as possible.

I obeyed orders strictly, and in a few minutes the cable was cut and before Tom and I had the weather clue sheeted home Bill was with us. He sent me to the wheel, and with the help of Tom he managed to get the sail set and the braces trimmed after a fashion, though he had to leave the yard on the cap.

The brig was now before the wind, though she had nothing on her that drew except the topsail, and that was partly masked by the high ground of the island. Still the tide was running out of the inlet, and what with the wind and tide, we were dropping down to the open sea at a fairish rate.

Having satisfied himself that I could see

which way to steer, Bill took the topsail halyards to the capstan, and with the help of Tom managed to mast-head the yard. Then he went aloft to loose the main topsail. I ventured to lash the helm amidships and thus to leave it in order to help Tom with the topsail sheets.

The clanking of the pawls of the capstan had made a terrible noise, and it seemed to me impossible that the pirates on shore should not hear it; but there was no help for it, for we could not get the yard up without the capstan. It was the same thing with the main topsail, only it took longer to get the yard up and it seemed to me that the capstan made more noise than ever. Still we heard nothing of the pirates, and soon the main topsail was drawing nicely. I had gone back to the wheel while Bill was aloft loosing the maintop-gallant sail. I was beginning to think that we were out of danger, when suddenly a terrible roar like a clap of thunder, and a bright flash from

the shore, changed my mind. At the same instant a twenty-four pound ball flew over the brig, and Bill yelled at the top of his lungs, "Jump below there and put out that cabin light." Almost at the same moment he slid down the back stay, and calling for Tom hauled away with the strength of a giant at the top-gallant sheets.

CHAPTER XI.

GOOD-BY TO OLD BILL.

THE light shining from the cabin window made a fine mark for the battery, and I lost no time in blowing it out. Our prisoner was lying where we had left him, but as he was gagged he naturally did not speak to me, and I was in too much of a hurry to speak to him, for there was no one at the wheel. When I returned to the deck Bill and Tom were hoisting the top-gallant yard, and when they had mast-headed it they came aft to where I was standing.

The battery had not fired but once. This surprised me, for I knew that in a very few minutes the brig would be clear of the inlet and out of range. We waited rather anxiously for another shot, but it did not come;

and when we had edged around a point of land at the entrance to the inlet and felt perfectly safe I expressed my wonder that they had not sunk us.

“It was only one or two chaps that fired that gun,” replied Bill. “S’pose now, that two fellows did happen to sight us under sail. Well, as they couldn’t man a boat and board us alone, they jest jumped into the battery and fired a shot so as to bring down the whole gang. But we can’t stop here, for we must trim them yards a bit.”

When the yards were trimmed—for we now had the wind a little on the starboard quarter—Bill dropped on the deck to rest. He seemed to be completely exhausted. But he had only rested a very few minutes when he got on his feet again and said he would loose the foretop-gallant sail. He seemed to stagger as he walked along the deck, and I called to him, begging him to wait and rest. He only answered, “There’s got to be more sail on her if we’re goin’ to get

clear of the schooner," and climbed slowly up the rigging.

From where Tom and I were standing—for, as I have said, I was at the wheel—we could not see the old man on the foretop-gallant yard, and we waited a long while for him to make his appearance on deck. He did not appear, however, and at last we got so uneasy that Tom, after hailing him and receiving no answer, went aloft to look for him. In a few minutes Tom came to me with a scared face and said that Bill was nowhere to be found.

I told Tom to take the wheel while I searched the deck fore and aft for the old man, but without success. The sail that he had gone aloft to loose was hanging in the brails, and it was evident that Bill had either fallen overboard in a fit, or that he had missed his footing. Of course it was idle to think of searching for him, for even if we had been strong-handed enough to put the brig about, I had heard Bill say that he

could not swim a stroke, and we knew that he must have gone to the bottom long before we missed him.

What with grief for the loss of the old man—for Tom and I had come to feel a strong attachment for him—and the certainty that we two lads could not work the brig without help, I felt more discouragement than I had yet experienced even when Bill and I were lost in the cave. It was Tom who put heart into me by reminding me that we were not alone, but that we had a man in the cabin who was at least as strong as poor Bill. “Why shouldn’t we make him work his passage?” asked Tom.

Why indeed? The idea was an excellent one, and taking my gun I went down into the cabin, lit a candle, put it where it could not light up the stern windows, and then took the gag out of Mr. March’s mouth, and asked him if he was hungry.

“Thankee, my lad,” he answered very cheerfully. “I could make shift to eat a bit

of cheese which you'll find in the pantry, and I'm as thirsty as a bucket of sand."

I found the cheese and some water, and gave the mate as much as he wanted. I did not venture to set his hands free, so I had to feed him as if he was a baby. This seemed to amuse him very much, and when he had finished his supper he asked me to get his pipe and tobacco out of his pocket and give him a smoke.

"You've captured this brig very handsome," he said after his pipe was lit. "It was well done considerin' there were only three of you — an old man and two boys."

"How do you know how many of us there are?" said I.

"Because, young gentleman, I've got a pair of ears and you forgot to gag 'em. I've heard your voice and your brother's voice and Bill's voice on deck, and never another voice. I don't say but what you may have a gang of deaf and dumb chaps with you, but it don't look probable."

I did not say anything, and Mr. March presently said, "I suppose you know your own business, but my advice to you is to get all the sail you can on her, for before daylight the schooner will be in chase of you, and she is faster than the Swansea, unless it blows a livin' gale."

I told him that the brig was doing very well, and that we knew how to sail her.

"But you don't know how to navigate her," he rejoined. "Bill, I know, can't read, and couldn't work up observations even if he knew how to take 'em. It's mighty lucky for you that you found me here, instead of some ignorant, lazy fellow who would only have been a trouble to you."

"So you are ready to join with us, are you?" I asked.

"Am I a natural born fool?" he replied. "Why, what else could I do? I joined the men when they mutinied because I'd rather be captain of the brig than walk the plank. All the same they didn't keep their word,

and after I had navigated them to the island they made another chap from the schooner captain of the Swansea. Now if I join you and navigates this ship into port, I expect you'll stand by me, and get the owners to allow me salvage. Whereas, if I don't join you, I'll have to lie here till you run up against the land somewhere, and then I'll either be drowned or hanged, accordin' as I get ashore or don't."

"But how can we trust you, Mr. March?" I asked. "You helped seize this brig; you're a pirate, and you naturally want to get the brig in your hands and deliver her to the pirates again."

"I don't naturally want to do any such thing," he answered. "They'd shoot me even if I brought the brig back to them, because they'd say you couldn't have captured her if I'd kept a good lookout; and they'd be right about it, too. I've as much reason to want to get away from the island as you have, and you need me a great sight

more than I need you. So do as you choose. Take me or leave me. Only you'll make a mistake if you lose the services of an able navigator."

"Very well, Mr. March," I said, "we'll trust you. Come on deck at once and help us make sail. I might as well tell you that Tom and I are alone. Old Bill has fallen overboard from aloft."

"Then you couldn't get on without me, even if you wanted to," said the mate. "Please remember that when you come to see the owners. They'd ought to give me half the value of the brig for salvage. It's a great pity that there isn't anything in her but ballast and stores, and mighty little stores, too."

I unfastened Mr. March's arms and he stood up and stretched himself. Then he clapped me on the back and said, "Never fear, my lad. We'll take this brig into Charleston and make all our fortunes. But we've got to get every foot of canvas on her

that will draw, and we mustn't lose any time about it, either."

We went on deck, and as soon as we had set the top-gallant sail Mr. March braced the yards around and changed the course of the brig from due north to due east. By this means he hoped to deceive the pirates, who would naturally suppose that our first attempt would be to run directly before the wind and reach the nearest American port as soon as possible. Besides, the Swansea's best sailing point was with the wind abeam, as I ought to have remembered, but did not.

We worked hard for hours, and finally succeeded in setting every sail that the Swansea owned, except the studding sails. It was two o'clock by the time we had finished, and then Mr. March insisted that either Tom or I should go below till four o'clock. It was finally agreed that I should have the first rest, so I went below, and in two minutes was fast asleep in the captain's stateroom.

When Tom called me it was broad daylight, and I noticed that instead of staying below to rest he hurried on deck as soon as he saw that I was awake. I was not long in following him, and as soon as I put my head out of the companion-way, I saw that something was the matter.

A fine fresh breeze was blowing and the Swansea, being lighter than I had ever known her to be, was rushing through the water at the rate of nearly ten knots an hour. Tom was at the wheel, and the compass told me that we were still heading east. The mate was standing near the main rigging, with a telescope in his hand, and away to the westward, so far that I could not make out her rig, I could see a sail.

"That's the schooner," he said, as he shut up the glass and came aft. "I know her as well as if she was a cable-length from us."

"Do you think she sees us?" I asked.

"Sees us! Why, if we can see her, she can't help but see us."

"Can you tell how fast she is gaining on us?" asked Tom.

"I can't tell yet, but the odds are that she's running two feet to our one. She's a much faster boat than we are, and this is just the wind that suits her."

"Is there anything that we can do that we haven't done?" I asked anxiously.

"Nothing. The only thing we can do is to overhaul the gun and try to knock a stick out of her when she comes near."

So saying the mate asked me to come with him and cast loose the long gun, which we did in a few minutes, for he knew all about the handling of big guns. Then we went below to where the pirates had made a magazine on the lower deck, and brought up a dozen rounds of ammunition, which we stowed on deck in the lee of the deck-house. Then Mr. March loaded the gun, and built a fire in the galley so that he could heat a poker to use in firing the gun.

"Now that we've got a fire, we'll have some

coffee, and then Master Tom and me will take an hour below, for we need to feel fresh when the pinch comes. The brig is going along as steady as a wagon, and if you want to rouse me out you can pound on the deck with a handspike."

We had our coffee, and then the mate and Tom left me alone at the wheel with a handspike within ready grasp.

My gun and Tom's were still loaded, but we had no more ammunition. We had left our ammunition and all our other traps in our boat when we boarded the brig, and Tom must have made her fast carelessly, for when we went to look for her, after we had got clear of the inlet, she was gone. However the guns I knew would be of little use in a fight with the schooner; for if she once should get near enough to board us, it would be useless to resist.

I let my companions sleep as long as I dared, but the schooner gradually gained on us, and in two hours after I came on deck

she was so near that I could easily make her out. I therefore pounded on the deck and almost immediately Tom and the mate were with me.

“In an hour more she’ll be near enough for her big gun to reach us. She won’t try to hit us, though, for they don’t want the job of repairing the brig when they get her. She’ll come alongside, and if we don’t surrender she’ll board us.”

“When her gun can reach us, our gun can reach her, can’t it?” asked Tom.

“To be sure it can,” answered Mr. March, “and may be we’ll have the luck to cripple her. Anyway we’ll try.”

It was slow work waiting through the next hour, but by that time the schooner was near enough for us to try a shot. Tom went to the wheel and the mate and I went forward.

I brought the poker from the galley, and Mr. March trained the gun with great care and primed it. Then he took the

poker and touched the loose priming, while I watched with the glass to see where the shot would strike.

But Mr. March had been so long in getting ready that the poker was cold, and we could not fire the gun. I had to heat it again, and when after all this preparation we fired and did not touch the schooner I was greatly disappointed.

The mate was not in the least discouraged. "No man ever hits anything the first time, and mostly he misses the second time. Wait till I get a third shot, and perhaps it will do some work." He was always a cheerful man, and whatever it might be that he was doing, he was better satisfied with himself than any man I ever saw.

Our second shot was as bad as the first one, and it took us so long to load and fire that the schooner kept gaining on us frightfully. We had to bring the brig up pretty close to the wind every time we fired, so as to bring the gun to bear on the schooner,

and of course every time we did this we lost headway.

But the third shot went through the schooner's main topmast, just above the hounds, and took in her topsail for her in a hurry. This brought her speed down to just about ours, and the mate said that he would only fire one more shot, and that then he would go to the wheel and see what close steering would do to help our sailing. This fourth shot made a hole in the schooner's foresail and evidently put her captain in a rage, for he began firing at us as rapidly as his men could work their long gun. They were much better marksmen than Mr. March, too. Their second shot carried our fore-top-mast, and the brig, coming up in the wind, was very nearly taken aback.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST OF THE SWANSEA.

WE could now no longer run, and our only chance of escape lay in crippling the schooner worse than she had crippled us. When she saw the effect of her shot she ceased firing, and came after us, luffing up to windward so as to board us on the weather side. Mr. March and I worked at the gun, loading as rapidly as possible, and aiming with the greatest care for the schooner's spar. We did little damage for some time, and it was not until the pirates were within half a mile that a lucky shot carried away their mainmast. We gave the loudest cheer that we could give, and then the mate and I jumped aloft and cut adrift the wreck of the foretop-mast. Meanwhile Tom was hanging

on to the wheel which he had to keep jammed hard up, for the brig had now no head sail on except the fore-sail. We drew steadily away from the schooner, however, and as soon as we had cleared away the wreck we managed to set the foretop-mast stay-sail flying, leading the halyard to a block lashed to a bolt in the head of the foremast. This helped her a little, and made her steer somewhat easier.

All the while Mr. March and I were at work aloft the schooner was firing at us. Sometimes she aimed apparently at our spars with the hope of dismasting us, but for the most part her shot struck us in the hull, and I was convinced that in their rage, the pirates were trying to sink us. But beyond cutting up our running gear and putting a few holes through our sails, the schooner seemed to do us little harm. The wind was freshening, and the pirates were brought almost to a standstill by their mainmast which was towing overboard with all its



WE DID LITTLE DAMAGE UNTIL THE PIRATES WERE WITHIN HALF A MILE.



gear, and which they were unwilling to cut adrift probably because they had no spare mainsail with them.

The schooner made no further effort to follow us, and when we had distanced her so far that it was useless for her to waste shot on us, she ceased firing. We were, you may be sure, pretty well tired with hard work and excitement, and after we had eaten our breakfast, such as it was, I relieved Tom at the wheel and he and the mate lay down on the deck to rest.

“It’s very queer that all that cannonading did us so little harm,” said Tom. “I always thought a cannon was such a terrible thing. But its bark is worse than its bite.”

“We were in a bad way at one time,” said the mate. “What would you have done if I hadn’t been here to work the gun? It was my shot that saved us, and considering that I’m entitled to half the value of the ship for recapturin’ her, I’ve earned the other half by beatin’ off the pirates in a

fair fight. Not but what you young gentlemen have behaved very well, and I promise you that I'll see to it that the owners stand something to you in the nature of a reward."

"It seems to me," said I, "that the brig feels heavier than she did. She doesn't rise to the seas as lively as when we were running away early this morning."

The mate started up and looked over the side. "You're right," he cried. "She's deeper than she was. I'll go below and see if she is leaking."

He dived down the main hatchway, and in a very short time came back looking rather grave. "Some of those shot have hit her below the water line," he said. "I can hear the water runnin' into her. The lower hold has got four feet of water already. We must start the pumps or we'll never see Charleston."

The pump was so heavy and cumbersome that two men could not work it long without being tired out. The mate and Tom,

however, went to work with a will, and kept a big stream of water pouring out of the scuppers for at least half an hour. Then the mate sounded the well and found that the water had gone down an inch. This was a proof that the leak could be kept under as long as we could keep the pumps going. We were much encouraged—at least Tom and I were—and I took Mr. March's place at the pump while he took my place at the wheel.

We pumped another half-hour, and lowered the water another inch. Mr. March then went below and tried again to find the leak, but it was where he could not get at it. He and I then fell to pumping again, but before the half-hour was up we were so utterly exhausted that we dropped the brakes and threw ourselves on the wet deck.

"There's no use in pumpin' any more," said the mate. "We can't free her. All we could do with the pump would be to keep her afloat a little while longer than if we didn't break our hearts and backs."

"But we can lower the water an inch every half-hour," said I.

"There's four feet in her now, let's say. That's forty-eight inches, ain't it? Very well. Suppose we could pump two hours at a spell; that would lower the water four inches only. Then we'll have to rest an hour, and she'd make a foot or two of water in that time. I'm willin' to pump another hour and a half, after we're rested a bit, just so as to get as far away from where we left the schooner as we can, but after that we'll let the old Swansea go and take to the boats."

There was good sense in what the mate said. It did seem a hopeless task to try to save the brig by pumping. However, Tom had an idea, and as usual it was a good one.

"Mr. March," said he, "why can't we get a sail over the side, and stop the leak that way?"

"That's just what I was goin' to do," replied the mate. "It may not work, but we'll

try it. There's the fore topsail lying on the deck all ready as soon as we cut it adrift from the yard. Wait till I rest a bit longer, and then we'll see what we can do."

It was a long job getting the sail over the side, and stretching it over the place where we supposed the leak must be, but we did it at last, and then went to the pumps again. We pumped a good half-hour and sounded the well, only to find that we had lowered the water just an inch and no more. So it was plain that the sail did no good. This was discouraging, especially as the water had been gaining all the time we were working with the sail, and was now four feet and six inches deep.

"Never mind," exclaimed Mr. March. "Thunder away at the pump, boys, for another hour if we can do it, and then we'll knock off for good. I reckon that she'll float a good four hours yet, and we'll have plenty of time to get a boat ready and start away comfortably."

We pumped as long as we could, without regard to time, and only gave up when we had so little strength left that we really could not work the pump.

The schooner had long been out of sight, and as it was now five o'clock in the afternoon, we resolved to rest till seven, and then get a boat ready. In the meanwhile there was nothing to gain by carrying sail, so we brought her close to the wind under the main topsail, and the makeshift fore stay-sail that we had set after losing our fore topmast. Under this sail she would very nearly steer herself, and we were able to leave the wheel; only we had, of course, to keep a sharp lookout, and run to the wheel whenever she came up too close.

I think I never was so exhausted in my life as I was that day, and the mate and Tom were quite as much exhausted as I was. We made some coffee and made a supper of coffee and biscuit, and then we all lay down on the poop. We must have

dropped asleep almost instantly. I was awakened by the loud flapping of a sail, and sprang up just as Mr. March and Tom awoke. It was bright starlight.

It was a beautiful quiet night with a light breeze, but I was alarmed to see that the main deck was all awash, and that the brig was fairly water-logged. I ran to help clear away the boat, while Tom filled a breaker from a fresh-water cask, and the mate went to the binnacle and took out the compass. We put the water and the compass in the solitary quarter-boat that remained to us, and then Mr. March told us to jump in and lower away as soon as possible, for the brig might sink any moment.

We got the boat in the water safely, for the brig had little way on her and the sea was smooth. Then we rowed a short distance from her and waited for her to sink. We did not have to wait very long. Quietly enough the Swansea settled down and disappeared. Had we slept fifteen minutes

longer we should have gone down with her.

We were again adrift in a small boat, and very much worse off than we were when, with old Bill, we started in a small boat from Florida. Then we had provisions and a sail. Now we had no sail and there was nothing in our boat besides the oars except a compass and a breaker of water. Besides, we were far out at sea, and had not the least idea where we were.

“Keep your courage up, boys,” said the mate. I noticed that lately he had ceased to call us “young gentlemen,” and instead always called us “boys.” “We’ll make Charleston yet; never fear. We’ve got no grub, but we’ve got plenty of water, and we’ll make the Florida coast before we starve, let alone that we may be picked up or may catch a fish or a turtle. Just pour a little water into my shoe, will you, and give me a drink. It’s mighty lucky for you that you’ve got an experienced sailor to look

after you. Without me, now, you'd have walked the plank hours ago."

Mr. March took off his shoe and passed it to Tom to be filled with water, but when he had taken a drink he spat it out, and cried, "Where did you get that water? It's salt."

"I got it out of a cask on deck," said Tom.

"Well, the salt water has got to it, and we've got nothing to drink. Unless we're picked up we're all dead men. This comes of trusting to boys."

"I thought you'd done everything, Mr. March," said I, "and that we boys were under your care."

"Don't answer me back, boy," said the mate, "for I won't have it. It's all your fault that we haven't any water, and I was a fool ever to have anything to do with you." So saying he lay down in the bottom of the boat, with his face on his arms, and remained silent until he fell asleep.

We were undoubtedly in a perilous position, but I could not hear poor Tom blamed for what was not his fault. He came aft to where I was sitting and said, "I'm sorry, but I could not help it." So I comforted him and told him that the Lord who had preserved us so far would not let us die of thirst; and we put our arms about each other and sat still.

There was so little sea that the boat did not need any attention, so we let her drift, and being so excessively tired we too fell asleep after a while, and slept as soundly as if we had been in our beds. We did not awake until daylight, and then I startled the mate by a loud cry, for there was a big ship not half a mile away and heading directly for us.

There was no fear that the ship would miss us, for we could see men on the fore-castle head looking at us, and by the time we had got on our legs and hailed her at the top of our lungs, we saw the main top-

sail yard swung round and the ship was hove to.

We got out our oars and pulled as if we were crazy, but it seemed an endless time before we reached the ship and found ourselves safe on board.

She was the London City, bound to Charleston from the Mediterranean, and the captain was as kind and pleasant as he could be. As soon as we came on board he called us down into his cabin, where he asked us who we were and where we came from.

I was going to answer, but before I could speak Mr. March told the captain that he was in charge of the boat, and that after the crew of the Swansea — of which he had been mate — had mutinied and set the captain adrift, and carried him (the mate) a prisoner to the Bermudas, he had watched his chance and carried off the brig single-handed, with a little help from us two boys, who had been passengers; that he had fought the Swansea when she was after-

wards attacked by a pirate schooner and had beaten the schooner off, but that afterwards the Swansea had sunk in consequence of the injuries received during the battle. He added that we were both good boys, and had really been of considerable help to him.

We did not contradict him, but we resolved to tell the whole truth as soon as we reached Charleston. We were afraid that the captain of the London City would not believe us, and thought it did not make much difference to us what story the mate might tell.

But when we got to Charleston the mate told the same story to the owners of the ship — or rather to their agents — and when Tom and I tried to tell what was really the truth no one believed us, because the captain of the London City said that we had admitted that the mate's story was true while we were on board his ship. So Mr. March was paid a handsome sum of money

for what was called his noble conduct, and we were warned to stop telling stories against him. Soon afterwards Mr. March went to sea again, and I never heard of him afterwards. All in good time, when my uncle came to know Tom and me, and to know that we could be trusted, he believed our story, and that was of more consequence to us than the opinion of strangers who knew nothing of us.

This is the end of the story of the Swansea, and I am glad to say that piracy has almost ceased, and that honest seamen can now follow their profession without fear of such wretches as the bloodthirsty Blackbeard, the ferocious England, and other cruel rovers of their like.



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